Adventure

"With nineteen men out of twenty the sudden blow would have gone home.
Captain Kettle was the exception."

APRIL
15 CENTS

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THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, PUBLISHERS OF EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

Crook Doctor Cupid Night

YOU LIKED IT. At least, everybody that read it did. "The Crook and the Doctor," the first novelette ADVENTURE ever published. Dr. John I. Cochrane's story of a prison doctor and the great crook, "Sled" Wheeler—a crook who was, in his way, a splendid man—a stanch friend, a bitter enemy. You met Wheeler and the doctor again in "Cupid and the Crook," and in the May ADVENTURE (out April 5th) you will meet them again in

"The Open Night"

That is enough to say. Yet there are two things that may be added:
First, this story is even better than the two others.
Second, there really *was* a "Sled Wheeler" (under another name); several of the other characters are real people; and—that grim and mysterious secret order actually exists.

No story ADVENTURE has ever published—not even Gouverneur Morris's "Yellow Men and Gold"—has brought in such a deluge of enthusiastic praise as has "The Soul of a Regiment." In the May number Talbot Mundy tells another stirring tale, this time of the Crimean War.

Also "The Call," by Peter B. Kyne, and more of "The Marriage of Kettle;" another funny Jake Buchmuller story, a "Witless Dick" tale with a great sea-fight, a story by Nevil G. Henshaw, and—and—and—but see for yourself. The best number yet is The May

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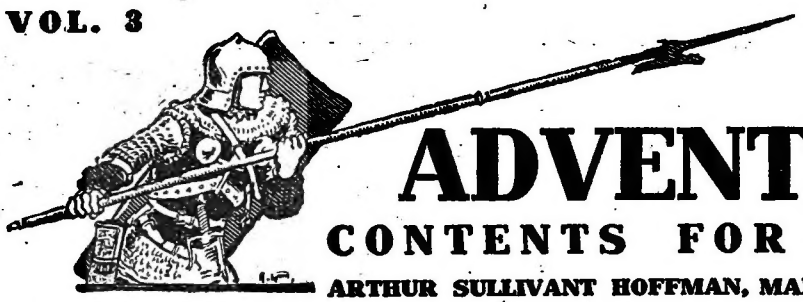
VOL. 3 NO. 6



ADVENTURE

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Issued monthly. Yearly subscription, $1.50 in advance. Single copy, fifteen cents

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

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Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

Erman J. Ridgway, President Ray Brown, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring & Macdougal Streets, New York City

5, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second Class Matter

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HE CAN build an *igloo* or drive a dog-team as well as any of them, for he lived thirteen months with a tribe of Eskimos. He has been a prisoner of the Sultan of Morocco, and he can hog-tie a full-grown steer, fashion a three-ended Turk's-head, or set up and operate a Maxim. He has harpooned whales, and spent a year on the Rock of Gibraltar. He knows Hudson Bay and the Latin Quarter of Paris; the Yukon and the streets of London. He has lived among the Crow Indians of Montana, and chased the Apaches of Arizona and the Chiracahuas of Mexico. And he was born in Boston.

And this is only part of what Stephen Allen Reynolds has done. He has never served in the Foreign Legion of France, but when you read his article in this number on that famous body of fighters you need have no fear of his not knowing his ground. He has met many a Legioner in his time, and he himself is a soldier of fortune and knows the breed. He has served in the Scots Guards, the Thirteenth Regiment of Prince Albert's Somersetshire Light Infantry, the Fifth Royal Irish Lancers, and in the Seventh and the Third United States Cavalry. He was General Shafter's orderly and assistant interpreter until the fall of Santiago.

Some day, when there is lots and lots of space, I'll try to give a rough outline of all that Mr. Reynolds has done, but even an outline is a matter of pages, not of paragraphs. The few things I have mentioned here are only a hint, for the wanderlust has driven him about the world for twenty-three crowded years.

Fortunately, he has turned his attention to writing fiction and special articles, and, with his wealth of interesting material, there are some good tales in store for us. You will remember his "Victoria Cross Stories," in our February number, written under his nom-de-plume of "Allan Stephens." Hereafter he writes under his own name.

WHAT kind of men are these real adventurers when you come to know them? Of course, they are interesting, but what are they like personally? That is a question hard to answer. They do not classify under one head. No more than do those of us who stay at home. Less so, perhaps, since it is generally a strongly marked individuality that drives them out of the beaten track and away from conventionalities.

There is Captain Fritz Duquesne, for example—dark, alert, handsome, lithe as a panther and, I think, a little quicker; laughing, hail-fellow-well-met, impulsive, generous; the flashing eyes you read of in fiction, and the fiery soul that could not have been his if he had been Dutch Boer instead of French Boer.

Stephen Reynolds—quiet, solid, direct, modest, kindly, slow in his movements, but, I dare say, quick enough when need be.

ALGOT LANGE—you would put him down off-hand as a university student. When you read (probably in the next number) of his adventures among South American cannibals, and his terrific hardships in the Amazon rubber country, you will change your mind. Young, rather tall and slender, bespectacled, stooped a little, gentle—perhaps gentle first of all—and yet in none of these men have I seen the flame of adventure burn so unquenchably as it does in him. German blood burns quietly, if it burns at all, but for sustained intensity it has few equals.

H. D. Couzens, whose story, "A Violation of the Statutes," you will find in this number—one of those "typical Americans" who differ so much among themselves. Tall, big, quiet, soft-spoken, direct; only his eyes indicate the rapidity with which he could move in a tight corner.

WHEN I say that one is modest or generous, or something else, I do not mean that the others are not; but one can not use the same adjectives over and over again, even when they apply. As to modesty, well, once in a while, a real adventurer comes in who sings too loud a song, just as we sometimes have visits from liars, but, taking them as a class, they are fine men and good fellows. Certainly we in the office have formed among them friendships that we value highly.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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Adventure

Registered in the United States Patent Office

APRIL
1912
VOL. 3
NO. 6

THE MARRIAGE OF KETTLE

By C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

SYNOPSIS: Owen Kettle, mate of the *Norman Towers*, seizes needed coal from a German steamer in the Sargasso Sea. Violet Chesterman, a passenger, transfers to the *Towers* and becomes interested in Kettle. At Liverpool Miss Dubbs, barmaid, rescues Kettle from thugs, becomes engaged to him, and secures him the captaincy of the *Wongaroo*, chartered by Violet's brother, Sir George, to search the west coast of Africa for a wrecked steamer with valuable copper. Kettle makes McTodd engineer. Violet, with Miss Dubbs as companion, joins the ship. The wreck proves to be the old *Norman Towers*. Miss Dubbs, jealous of Violet, breaks her engagement. Sidi Mohammed Bergash, a native Berber but a Cambridge graduate, seems interested in the wreck. Kettle alone suspects him and shifts his ship's position.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOSTILITIES OPEN

CAPTAIN KETTLE put a cigar between his teeth, but he did not venture to light it, nor did he risk the clanging bell of the engine-room telegraph. Instead he applied his lips to the voice-tube and got into communication with a very sober and alert McTodd, who said he had found it necessary to put his chief to bed. . . .

The *Wongaroo* gathered way slowly and without noise, and Captain Kettle, to avoid the clamor of giving orders, took the steam steering-wheel in his own hands. The night ahead was without beacon and full of a dense, amorphous darkness, but with a sailor's knack of memory the little sailor

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had the bearings of his old anchorage and of every salient point of the lagoon firmly charted in his head and worked out a dead reckoning of his steamboat's course as he went along. He kept one eye on the carefully hooded binnacle, and the other roving through the blackness ahead, and did sums each minute as to direction and distance run without mental inconvenience, as is the habit of sailormen, and incidentally kept an attentive ear for the talk and laughter in the saloon below to make sure that his owner, Miss Chesterman, and the Saint were still merrily engaged in their occupation of killing time. And when he reckoned he was within a hundred yards of the *kherbs*, and had called to Mr. McTodd to "whack her up all he knew," he was conscious of an elaborate head and a pair of comely shoulders protruding above the head of the upper bridge ladder behind him.

"Captain," came a voice, "it's dark, and no one will see. May I come up on top here? I know what's going on, and I don't feel as if I could stay below anyhow."

"For the Lord's sake, Miss, go back there! 'Tisn't safe for you up here."

"It would be no worse for me than it will be for you. And it's miserable down there in the dark, and alone. Miserable."

"But they may begin shooting and all sorts of things presently."

"It would be no worse for me than it will be for you." She had come up on the bridge by this, and he heard her voice behind him and slightly above him. The position was desperate, and one can hardly blame him for what he did.

"Go aft a bit, and to starboard. No, the other, the starboard side; yes, there. Now, see that boat on the chocks? Yes, that's it. Now, if you want to stay on this deck you're to get inside that and keep your head under the gunwale, and the Lord grant the boat's skin keeps out their gas-pipe bullets, though I don't think it will."

THE *kherbs* had heard the steamer's coming by this time. But they strung out into a line and gave themselves over as her prey. She had worked up by this time to the full eight knots of her speed, and Kettle steered her into the rearmost *kherb* and drove over it, and then held on for the next ahead. Those of the lighter's crew who were wise struck out straightway for the shore. Those who had more talent for fighting leaped for the *Wongaroo's* low rail as they stamped the wreck of their own craft under water, and hauled themselves up, and were met by frenzied white men flailing at them with iron clubs. *Whack*, *crash*, *crunch* went the belaying pins, and true believers fell back into Paradise or the lagoon.

The *Wongaroo* scraped over the ruins of the first *kherb*, crunched through the second, and of her own accord put in her celebrated sheer to starboard and bagged the third. But she was a slow little tub when all was said and done, and anyway she was not built for a ram, and the impacts had shaken her a good deal and knocked off her pace and upset her steering, and *kherb* number four, furiously rowed, managed to beach itself and emit its crew intact.

"But still I don't call that bad," said a quiet voice from behind, and Captain Kettle rang off his engines and turned round to gaze upon a lighted cigar, and the face of Sidi Mohammed Bergash.

"Get down off my bridge!"

The little sailor yapped out the words with venomous precision, and then turned to the two other figures behind. "As to you, sir, you may be my owner, but of your own free will I heard you offer to serve under my commands, and I'm ashamed of your lack of discipline. As to your place, Miss, I make no suggestion, but if you've heard all the language that's been flying about on this bridge during this last ten minutes, and liked it, I'm sorry for your taste, that's all."

"I apologize, Skipper," said Sir George.

"Very good, sir. Make it so. Take that native gentleman with the English accent down below and keep him there till I come. And if he doesn't want to go, tell the bo's'n to put him in irons. By James, I'm going to have discipline on this ship, or I'll know the reason why!"

When these had left the upper deck, out of sheer delight in his own skill in seamanship, (and I am afraid also through knowledge that Miss Dubbs was a spectator in the lifeboat behind him) Kettle swung the steamer round and, plotting a course through the unrelieved dark, made back for the spot whence he had started. He returned as he had come, full steam ahead, and slowed up only to bring the steamer's forefoot to a standstill on the anchor buoy.

"Well, of all the beastly gallery tricks I ever saw!" sneered Mr. Trethewy the Mate

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on the forecastle head as he oversaw the picking up of the buoy.

"But don't you wish you could do it yourself, my son?" hiccoughed Mr. McTodd from under the break of the forecastle. "Painting deckhouses is about all you're good at. I don't trust you to make fast a mooring rope unless I oversee it myself afterwards to make sure you haven't a slippery hitch. My young friend, I tell ye that the officers and crew of this packet are a great source of anxiety to the Old Man and myself. And if anybody dislikes that statement, I'm free to fight him this minute. And now, the night being hot, and maneuvers being over, I'm going to drop into the lagoon for a bit of a swim. Leave me this rope's end over the side to climb back aboard by."

In the meanwhile argument held sway in the saloon.

"Im afraid," said the Saint, "from your point of view it must look uncommonly fishy."

"I'm sure my Skipper thinks so," Sir George agreed.

"Well, I'll ask you not to let him hang me out of hand, which I gather would be his agreeable method of making all things entirely safe; and of course if you insist on keeping me on board as a hostage, I shall have to stay. But really I think I should be of more use to you ashore. These aren't my people, as I've told you, but as Kaid of the big Berber tribe hereabouts I have a good deal of local influence."

Sir George Chesterman rubbed his chin. "This attack will take a bit of explaining, you know."

"If you mean your Captain's unprovoked attack on some boats that hadn't harmed him, I should say it will."

The big untidy Englishman laughed. "Of course those four or five hundred armed ruffians had come out merely for a quiet evening's row? However, my dear man, we won't worry about past history. The question is what's going to be done next? We, I should again like to remind you, have come here to salvage that steamer, and the sooner we get it the better it will be for the neighborhood."

The Berber chief threw back his head. There was a hard glint in his blue eyes. "Well, you will not get the steamer. By the customs of this coast she belongs to the people of the coast; she is their property and I am going to see that they get her."

"I thought you said an hour ago that you were a rich man. What good's this wretched old wreck to you, even if you can realize on her, which is doubtful?"

"In money, no good whatever. But, my dear Chesterman, you make the usual superficial Englishman's mistake. If any one asks you suddenly what is your aim in life you always reply without thinking that money's the one thing you want. You don't really mean it, but you've got into the habit of saying it. Now money doesn't amuse me a bit. With the curse of my English education behind me, I tell you frankly this country bores me stiff, and if you were to forget I came on board here under a flag of truce—which, of course, you can't—and hang me out of hand, 'pon my word I should be a good deal obliged to you! And I'm sure it would save you a lot of trouble."

"Of course you can be put ashore when you wish. And you may either tell us now your future policy, or you can do the other thing."

"Now you're angry. Don't you call that a bit unreasonable of your brother, Miss Chesterman? I've been quite frank with you about the shore situation and our resources, instead of leaving you to find out all that for yourself; I've pulled the handicap distinctly in your favor; and yet I know you'll be angrier with me still when I tell you that presently I'm going to fight for the possession of that useless and rusty old steamer for all that I'm worth. I wish you could understand what a boon fighting is to a man who comes of a fighting stock when he's bored to death with existing things, and finds, moreover, that his amiable subjects are beginning to talk about constitutions and other absurd modern fads, and need some smart blood-letting to bring them back to their senses again."

Violet Chesterman shut her fan with a click. "Now look here, you two, this has gone far enough, and to my mind it's getting ridiculous. You talk about fighting as if you were challenging one another to a game of polo. George, go up and fetch Captain Kettle down to have a whisky and soda, and by the time you are back I think you will find that Mr. Bergash and I have arrived at a friendly treaty. He has already suggested that his mother should call on me."

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CHAPTER XXV

THE ROYAL CARAVAN

CAMELS on sunlit land—and at a respectable distance, are, I think, always decorative. From an artistic point of view it is always advisable to keep them there—namely on sand and at a distance, because nearness to the workaday camel quite takes the enchantment from the view of him. To begin with, he is mangy from his hurricane deck to his big splay feet, and out of every ten square inches that ought to be covered with hair, he wears nine square inches bald. He emits evil noises and an evil smell. He wears camel ticks about his person which he shares with any one who comes near him, and they subsequently have to be removed from one's body by a minor surgical operation. When he bites—which he does with his lips, not teeth—the effect is very much the same as having one's fingers slammed into the hinge-side of a railway carriage door. He is as ungrateful as a Greek, and treacherous as an Armenian. A horse will not drink after him, sheep avoid the pasture he has fouled, and even a jackal will not eat him when he is dead if there is any other carrion within reach. Also he is the only possible beast of burden for many thousand square miles of this imperfect earth's surface.

The camels tipped out from behind a dune, with nodding heads and ridiculous necks, and swung down on to the beach opposite the rusted *Norman Towers*, and then held along the hard sand, northward. Some had riders, some carried bales, and two wore hood-shaped tilts, bright with blue and red draperies.

"The ladies will be inside those covered contraptions," Sir George explained.

"How ghastly hot they must be, poor dears!" said his sister. "Those coverings look like carpet."

"They are carpet," said the Saint, "and of our own weaving. We're rather proud of them. I'd got some on the floor of my rooms at Cambridge, and the art people and the furniture cranks who came to see me went into ecstasies over the coloring. Also there's camel's-hair cloth underneath. But a woman's *douar* is by no means as hot as you'd think. Indeed in war times we put our wounded into them to keep the poor fellows away from the heat."

"There seems to be a very large escort," said Sir George rather thoughtfully, "considering that you said the country is perfectly quiet."

Sidi Bergash laughed. "I suppose you on your part would describe London as perfectly quiet, yet when your king and queen go about, they not infrequently have quite a small army clattering along at the heels of their chariot. I'm sorry I don't impress you as anybody out of the ordinary, Chesterman, but really, when I am at home I am a genuine potentate, and my mother a real queen. To be quite frank with you, ceremonial bores me, but my mother likes it. She was brought up to it, you see. My poor old dad was a great stickler for that sort of pageant and etiquette. I believe, to be historical, we got it from the Vandals in the early Middle Ages, when our people hired themselves out as mercenaries to help in the mid-European war; and if you care to think of it, the modern Germans, who I suppose are the Vandals' lineal descendants, are just as keen on pomp and circumstance to-day."

"I was only wondering how we are going to find room for them all. We're a bit cramped here, you know, on this little tub."

"Oh, you needn't worry about putting up all the entourage. They'll form camp, as you'll presently see, on the shore, and I should think, when it comes to the point, my mother will prefer to sleep there too. She talked very big, poor dear, about her keen desire to accept your invitation to come and live N'zaranee fashion on a N'zaranee ship, but I expect when she really tries it she'll detect a wobble even on this smooth lagoon. I believe some of our people did once hire out as rowers to a Phenician galley and pick up a certain amount of seamanship there; but that's quite a long time ago now, and since then we seem to have stuck pretty well to *terra firma*, and have worse nautical insides than a Frenchman. There's just one more thing——"

"Well, go ahead, man."

"You see the state religion is Mohammedanism, and it's part of the game that our women go veiled. I think it rot myself, but you can't get over the prejudices of centuries, with the Prophet at the back of it as a closing retort to all possible arguments, especially as the old gentleman is counted as a direct ancestor. Besides, as I've told you, my mother is rather old-fashioned in

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her ideas, and I'm afraid she looks upon my modern European views as merely scandalous."

"Oh, we quite expected your mother would come veiled," said Violet, "and I got the Captain to give me a big stateroom that opens off the engine-room alley-way, and which up to now they've used for stores. He's had what cases were left sent down to the hold, and the stewardess and I have dodged it up into a really pretty little sitting-room. At night we can rig the berths if your mother comes to stay on board, but in the meanwhile it's quite the Zenana, if that's the word. The only thing I'm troubled about is the cooking. Will she like our food?"

"Not in the least. But that need not disturb you. She brings her own food. I say, Chesterman, you might tell your Skipper to hold on with that boat he's trying to send away. They'll be awfully mad if you go amongst them before everything's ready, and I can tell you these elaborate ceremonial camps take quite a time to pitch."

ASHORE on the dazzling beach, the leading camel had halted, shut himself up in sections like a four-joint two-foot rule, and discharged his white-draped rider. The other camels, as they strolled up, swung out of line ahead into line abreast, and also came to moorings, and the escort, pulling farther round to the north, dismounted, drove in their picket-pins, and soon had their horses straddled out to impossible spans by well stretched heel-ropes. The diamond hitch, which the Western packer fondly imagines to be his own invention, was patented probably by the Camel Drivers of Mecca, and anyway is in current use in the Sahara to-day.

Drivers and escort jumped to the loads, threw off the lashings and opened bales. Tent-poles were laid out on level stretches of the sand at unexpected angles, camel's-hair cloth was laid over these, and then the men lifted and thrust and pulled, and there was the black tent, shaped like a dozen big beehives running into one another, of the sealed pattern that the Berber and the Bedouin and the Twareg have used since the beginning of time. Carpets were spread, and a gaudy red flag lettered in Arabic run up on a pole; other carpets were strung up to divide the tent off into chambers and to hide the crudities of the walls; and a divan was set in place and loaded with cushions. And then the camels that carried the *douar* were brought one by one to the doorway of the tent and made to kneel. The escort lined up on either side, lifting thick folds of their *jellabs* before their eyes. And so, out of sight of all men, the widow of the late Ibraham Bergash and her women moved from their places on camel back to the shelter of the black tent, and closed the flap, as became her state and sex.

Thereafter more black tents went up, these being arranged in a guarding circle, and then the camels were re-arranged, and parked in an outer circle beyond again, and fed. Each bubbling, squealing, snarling brute had its own particular tablecloth spread on the sand, with the measure of date-stones and grain heaped upon it. And then the blue smoke of cooking fires crept out from the sand and blew across and twitched the nostrils of those who watched upon the steamer.

"Don't you think it would be polite to put in a call now?" Miss Chesterman suggested.

"Wait," said the Saint. "We don't hurry matters in Court circles in the Atlas. My lady mother will make a move all in her own good time. Ah, and it won't be long now. Do you see that *kherb* coming out from behind the *Norman Towers?*"

"The one I didn't run down last night," Captain Kettle suggested acidly. "I wondered where it could have got to. Well, I'm perfectly ready and competent to send that below to join the rest of the fleet, care of Davy Jones, if occasion arises. I'm responsible for this ship, Mr. Bergash, and if whilst that lighter's alongside, another turns up from somewhere else and tries to join company, I shall just sink the one that's handy as a reasonable precaution."

"I should be the last to blame your wisdom in doing so. However, suppose you wait and see what happens before talking big any more."

It was a curious thing how Sidi Bergash and Captain Kettle disliked each other.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LADIES CALL

THE *kherb*, rowed slowly by a dozen oars, coasted slowly along the shore till it reached the camp halted there, and backed

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into the beach. Three men bearing burdens stepped on board, and the *kherb* pushed off again and slowly ferried these across to the *Wongaroo*. Captain Kettle put down his glasses with an angry sigh. The *kherb* was undecked, and everything within her frankly open to the eye. There was no chance of ambush or sudden attack, and reluctantly he allowed them to bring up alongside the ladder without further objection.

The three burden-bearers came up on deck, saw their Chief, did obeisance to him, and one with hung head delivered a message. He, like his fellows, was a rich plum-black color, clean-shaved and inclined to corpulence.

"Give the presents to Miss Chesterman," said Sidi Bergash.

Number one stepped forward with a bale in his arm, unrolled it with a jerk upon the deck, and displayed a carpet.

"Oh, George, how heavenly!" said the lady. "What perfect coloring!"

Number two, who carried a cushion, whisked away a cover and displayed what was evidently jewelry. They were apparently beads, graduated from the size of pigeon's eggs to the size of turkey's eggs. In color they were pale green, dull red and silver.

"Aren't they pretty? But what exactly are they?"

"Sus enamels," said the Kaid. "Practically a lost art since his Wickedness, my cousin the Sultan, has killed off all the people who used to make that sort of thing. You're really supposed to wear them round your neck, but you needn't if you don't want to. Don't jump when you see the next."

Number three removed his cover-cloth with difficulty, as it apparently stuck to the present below. Miss Chesterman beheld a copper bowl about the size of a wash-hand basin heaped up with something that looked like (as she said afterward) chicken food. It was greasy in texture, and smelt powerfully.

"What is it, please?"

"That is *couscousou*. It is not the sort we eat every day. It is the variety that appears only at state banquets. We keep our butter, as you know, in pot jars, and lay it down as you people do port at home, and pride ourselves on its age. I should say by the whiff I got of it that the butter that went to the making of that *couscousou* is twelve years old if it's a day, and it must have been a mighty wrench to the proud housekeeper to take the pot down from the very end of the last back-shelf. Also I'll ask you to observe the fat. The most corpulent flat-tailed sheep in the Western Atlas has died the death to do honor to you to-day, Miss Chesterman."

"I'm sure it's awfully kind of your mother, and the carpet really is lovely. But I don't see how—that is, should I——"

"You're not necessarily supposed to eat the *couscousou* yourself now on the spot. You may give that to some member of your staff, and I should say Captain Kettle is indicated in view of the officious care he has been taking of late of your Excellency's person."

"Oh, don't chaff, please. I mean I want to know what one ought to do. I never expected getting presents, although of course one does in the East. I suppose I ought to send something back."

"That is the general scheme," the Saint admitted with a dry smile, "and when your presents have arrived and been approved of at the other end, then the official calls are paid."

"But please help me. George, you owl, don't giggle! Mr. Bergash, what can I possibly send? I've got nothing; absolutely nothing!"

"Then it's certainly not for me to advise."

"Oh, you're as bad as George! Would a little amethyst brooch do for one thing?"

"If it's the one you were wearing last night, I should say far too good."

"Well, that'll do for one present. And I've some lace. It's Honiton. I'm sure your mother would like that. And do you think—no, never mind, I won't tell you what else. But I'm sure that'll be all right. And will these three men take them back? What are they, by the way?"

"You might describe them as harem attendants. No, it wouldn't be etiquette to send your presents otherwise than by your own messengers. The question is who to pick. They are supposed to be attendants on your person. For one I should suggest Captain Kettle."

"He certainly can't leave his ship," said Miss Chesterman hurriedly. "But I see your point, and," she added to the little sailor, "I'm sure you do too, Captain. Would you pick me three really nice men?"

"Certainly, Miss. The Mate shall go

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himself, with a couple of the cleanest deckhands as the other two carriers. They shall travel in style. I'll lend them my own gig and a crew of four."

And presently away went the gig, very smartly rowed, with a large new red ensign whipping about over her stern.

"In these sort of places," said Captain Kettle, "I like no one to be under any doubt as to what I am."

"I should like to see that little mate of yours moving his upper lip up and down," said Sir George, "when he hands over the presents. I hope he'll make the proper obeisances after the fashion of the—er—harem attendants who came here. However, I dare say they'll bring off the event without a hitch, as everybody seems determined to be friendly now. Much better this sort of method, Skipper, isn't it, than fighting the whole countryside?"

"I'll give you my opinion, sir, when we're away at sea again, with the *Norman Towers* steaming in company. It's useless to ask me, sir, to like Mr. Bergash. I can't do it. To my way of thinking he's a native, and he'll have all a native's faults tucked away somewhere, and the fact of his having been at Cambridge College makes him rather worse than better. You're owner, sir, and you and Miss Chesterman have a perfect right to behave to him as you please; but I can't forget that I'm master of this steamboat, and, as that, it's my duty to look out for dirty weather ahead. I've felt very keenly the stiffness there's been between us since Mr. Bergash came aboard, and if I've been driven to consolation, I think you'll own I've got my excuse."

SIR GEORGE stared. What on earth was this queer-headed little sailorman driving at now? "Consolation," he knew, was usually translatable as "whisky." If it had been McTodd, the meaning would have fitted in perfectly. But Kettle was not suspect; he was neither tee totaler nor drunkard; his was the easy sobriety that never exceeds. Finally, "I'm not good at guessing riddles," he said. "In what form is it you take your consolation?"

Captain Kettle reached an arm inside the charthouse door, and produced a chubby volume. "'Unction for a Stumbling Soul,' sir, is the title. Some of the verses in that book are the most splendid things that have ever been put on paper. They make you see cornfields, and smell violets, and hay, and hear the cows coming home to be milked. For a man that's never been in the country, reading them's like a peep through the outer lining into heaven."

"Good heavens! What a wonderful book! Poetry, is it? You must let me have a whack into it, Skipper, some day when you've a bit of time. Sorry to have ruffled you about Bergash, but if you've found such a satisfactory antidote, you're not so badly off as I thought." The big man had a keen sense of humor and as he ran his eye through the tawdry sentiment in the verses he wanted to shriek aloud. But he had a tenderness for Kettle's feelings, and kept his face wooden and expressionless. "A truly wonderful book! What a pity it's so little known."

"Real poetry, sir, needs a poet to appreciate it. But then you're a poet yourself."

"Oh, am I?"

"I knew it from the first moment we met, and with respect, that's why I liked you, sir, and why I made up my mind that you should have your salvage if I had to root up half Africa to get it. You see, there are moments—and they are mostly when things are going wrong with me, or I'm in tight places—when I write poetry myself."

This truculent little martinet a poet! There was real strain behind the woodenness of Sir George Chesterman's expression now. He tried to speak, and could not. Emotion, in fact, shook him like a palsy, though he fought against it vehemently, and if it had not been for a welcome diversion from the shore, it is conceivable that Captain Kettle's finest feelings might have been irretrievably shocked.

As it was, Sir George was able to point to the beach, and laugh with an absolutely clear conscience. "By Gad, Skipper, talk of fuss! Look there! You'd think from all that ceremony that the Queen of the East was coming to inspect the navy of Tarshish. How about getting her Majesty on board here, though? It won't do for any ordinary sons of Adam to look at her, that's plain. And, at the same time, a guard of honor is what she'll obviously expect. The only way I can see out of it is to line up all your deckhands in two rows, and make them hold their coat-tails before their eyes and let her march in state between them to the head of the companionway."

The lady's start from the shore was suffi-

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ciently striking. The cavalry of her escort mounted their horses and, setting them to the gallop, wove in and out of one another, and fired their long-barreled guns high into the air as fast as they could load them. Camel drivers with *jellabs* spread over their faces formed a double human palisade between the royal black tent and the beach, and then, and not before, did the black eunuchs unpin the tent flap.

Three women came out, profusely veiled and voluminously clad, and walked down somewhat clumsily on the hot loose sand to the beach. From his gestures those on the steamer could see that Mr. Trethewy was hospitably offering to take them off. But majesty preferred her own craft, the big *kherb*, and very possibly considered the smart gig was both cramped and dangerous. So off she was rowed in the ponderous lighter, she and her women and her black attendants, and the cavalry escort on the beach behind continued their fantasia, till the salt reek of their black powder blew across the lagoon and drove off the hawk-tailed African gulls that hovered round the steamer. The clumsy craft approached and drew alongside the *Wongaroo*.

Captain Kettle (with his soul soothed by poetry) had taken Sir George's mocking suggestion for a proper reception, to the foot of the letter, and the Berber ladies waddled across the decks between two rows of self-blinded all-nation deckhands, who were kept stiffly in position by a promise from their savage little Skipper that he personally would cave in the head of any son-of-a-dog amongst them who dared so much as to peep till the ladies were comfortably stowed away below. The men took his words to heart, for not one of them did.

The brown-bearded Saint met them at the foot of the ladder and escorted them up the side and across the deck, and Miss Chesterman (by instruction) received them at the head of the companionway, and Miss Dubbs closed the door upon the party of them as soon as the visitors had stepped across the high threshold.

Once down below, obviously there would be the difficulty which first arose round the Tower of Babel. But the Saint said it would be quite in order for him to be present as interpreter. Even in the strictest Moslem circles and in Berber petty courts it is quite within the law for a mother to unveil before her eldest son.

IT WAS Miss Dubbs who broke the confidence (if there was any) and described the ladies' appearance and doings to Captain Owen Kettle that evening in the quiet gloom of the starboard alleyway.

"Not a bit black," said she in answer to a question. "In fact, I should be browner myself if I'd been invited on deck occasionally and not been obliged to spend all my time at sewing below—Oh, you needn't start to apologize, Captain. I know my place, thank you—Anemic, in fact I should call that taller one. But the astonishing thing was they were all tattooed with blue lines across the top of their noses and the middle of their foreheads. How any woman could have that done, and on her face too, beats me. And their finger-nails were all colored red. I thought at first it must be something they'd been washing, and the dye'd come off. But it was too regular for that, and they were all alike. It must have been some stain put on on purpose. I suppose, poor things, they imagine it becomes them, just like the black stuff they'd got daubed under their eyes. You know; the same as actresses wear on the stage."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Dubbs," said her ex-admirer stiffly, "but as I believe I told you, I don't go to the theater. I do draw the line somewhere."

"It's so long since we've been on friendly terms, that I declare I've quite forgot your habits, Captain. However, there you are: eyes like actresses, and powdered cheeks; finger-nails manicured as I've said, and lips got up till they were red as a post-office letter-box. But Africans though they were, rigged up like you hear, there was nothing common about them. It was the old lady that did the talking, and she soon put your Miss Violet in her place, I can tell you. And what's more, I believe Mr. Bergash toned down what she was saying a lot before he put it into English. Oh, you can be sure that old lady thinks she's a queen, and she acts remarkably like as if she really was one."

"You seem impressed."

"I am." A little shiver went through all Miss Dubbs' generous proportions. "I'm not sure I don't wish I was home again, and out of this."

"Well, you've nothing to keep you here."

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing and no one. I've seen the bit of travel that I came out for, and now I wish I was back, serving

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at a nice upper-class bar. That old woman made me feel as if there was a goose walking over my grave. I don't feel safe here, and that's a fact, and I've no one to look after me."

"I'd do my best, if you'd let me."

"You! How many times have I heard you say that a Captain's duty is towards his owner first, last, and all the time? You've Miss Violet to look after, and I've no desire to trespass, thank you. Good evening, Captain. I must get below to tidy up my ladies' rooms."

CHAPTER XXVII

CAPTAIN KETTLE BARTERS

CAPTAIN KETTLE, with the professional assistance of the *Wongaroo's* cook, who was also butcher, was bargaining with some Coast Moors over five sheep.

The sheep, with their legs tied, lay in a boat alongside, and Kettle stood at the foot of the accommodation ladder, and the cook was in the boat, which sawed up and down at the foot of it.

The cook ran an expert hand over the animal's loins. "All very thin, sir, except this old ram, and I should say he'll be too tough for the cabin to eat."

"Do for the fo'c's'le?"

"Oh, he'd come sweet enough for them forrard." The cook turned angrily to one of the Moors, "Give over pawing me, you heathen! I can see that's the after end of the beast as well as you can. They've got flat tails, sir, like beavers, and by the feel of them the tails are just bladders of tallow."

The Moor evidently caught his meaning, and nodded vehemently both to the cook, and upward to Captain Kettle.

"That's all right, old son," said the cook. "We eat the sheep's smile, and when I'm let, I can dish that up very appetizing, having a Scotch aunt by marriage. But we've got no use for his nasty fat waggle." He made vigorous signs of cutting off the tails and throwing them into the sea.

The Moorish farmer was a picture of amazement and expostulation. He lifted wide his arms to the spruce little Captain Kettle and poured forth a torrent of Coast Arabic.

"You're wasting all those athletics," said the mariner. "Cookie's telling the truth for once—they're all liable to have these accidents. *No bono*, I tell you. *Tailo no bono. Tailo* make-a *couscousou, si.* Blackman, chop, *couscousou.* White-man *conspuez.*"

Captain Kettle's Arabic at that period of his career was elementary, but his accompanying gestures were vivid enough to supply all needful translation.

"Now, there are five sheep, *si?* Good, you savvy that. Well, if I take all the flock, savvy? All the five, *si?* I'll give you, savvy, this gold coin, which is a British half-sovereign. Now don't all you hayseeds get excited and talk at once. Let the agriculturist with the shaved top-edge of his mustache do the oratory. You! Yes, you! By James, do you heathen hear me? Let that man talk, and you others learn to keep quiet or I'll step down into that boat and teach you how. Come, squire, ten shillings for the flock, or else row away to the next market town. I'm not going to stand here on the front doorstep haggling all day long for a joint or two of fresh meat."

The man stopped and with frantic gesture pointed to the flat tails of the sheep, explaining how wide, how fat and how truly succulent they were, and signified that the five were worth five gold coins at the very lowest figure.

"The tails, if you choose," said Captain Kettle contemptuously, "you may cut off and take home with you, if you like. We're not pagans on this packet to have any hankering after animated tallow candles for our dinner. And take your ugly black paws off my trousers, you!"

Captain Kettle's neat pipeclayed shoe was uplifted and caught the man who was fingering him neatly on the shoulder and sent him rolling over into the bottom of the boat.

It is curious how some things strike the Moor. In nineteen cases out of twenty there would have been a roar of laughter from the others, who would have found the action a rough jest which exactly jumped with their taste. But here was the twentieth case. With the quickness of light one of the man's fellows drew a curved dagger from the brass sheath that hung by its red cord from his neck, and flew like a wild cat for the little sailor's throat. And with nineteen men out of twenty the sudden blow would have got home. Captain Kettle was the exception. His apprenticeship to the seas had been thorough, and he was

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always notorious for his quickness. He caught the man's wrist as it descended, ducked beneath it, and hove down. The fellow's elbow cracked noisily, and the knife fell into the water, and the victim shrieked.

"You might want that knife some day," said Captain Kettle, and sent him after it, broken arm and all.

But the other six Moors in the boat, as though it were a signal, pulled weapons and rushed in for vengeance, and one of them beat down the cook with his dagger-hilt in passing.

Kettle took the attack lightly enough. He ran up the ladder half a dozen steps backward, lugged a revolver from his pocket and pointed it with steady aim at the first man's stomach. He rushed—and was dropped, shot neatly through the shoulder. Two more followed, and were shot down, and the other three retired hurriedly to their boat and picked up the oars.

"No you don't!" said Kettle, and threatened them with his weapons. "Into the water you get and swim if you can, or drown if you choose, or be eaten by sharks if they'll have you. And if you've killed my cook, who at least can make curry, I'll plug the three of you!"

HE FORCED them furiously over the gunwale of the boat at the muzzle of his smoking revolver, and then stooped and made swift examination of his man.

"Ah, luckily for you cookie's not dead, and I think he'll be round again directly. On deck there! Mr. Forster! Send down a couple of hands and get these sheep run up on deck. They are confiscated as lawful fine and costs for attempted assault and battery."

An anxious face peered over the rail above. "My ——, Skipper," said Sir George, "what's all this shooting?"

"Nothing, sir, to be worried about. I was just trying this gun of mine to see how high up it threw when it fired. I've come to the conclusion that it takes a deal more practise than I've been able to put in at present to make a really neat revolver shot. I wonder if your Mr. Bergash could tell me whether the parties I dotted, and who, I see, are all managing to swim ashore, are some of his fellow Berbers, or whether he'd prefer to call them Moors?"

Captain Kettle ran nimbly up the ladder, and in the gangway came upon his owner wiping perspiration from a high forehead with tremulous handkerchief. "The treacherous devils!" said Sir George. "But I never saw a neater fight."

"Thank you, sir," said Captain Kettle, touching his cap. "But in view of what's happened I want to press upon you my idea that it would be as well if we got across to the old *Towers* and took possession of her without further palaver. I dare say Mr. Bergash may mean well; as you say so, I won't dispute it; but if we are in for a fight over at the other side of the lagoon there, I'd like to get it over before they have time to get ready any more surprise packets for us."

"Ye-es," Sir George agreed. "Just let's go into the charthouse a minute."

When they were there out of earshot of the crew and the door shut, "You know," said the older man, "what we carry as cargo?"

"I suppose you mean those Winchester repeaters and cases of ammunition?"

"Yes. Well, I've sold the lot. The rifles ran me to four pound ten apiece, and I'm getting ten ounces of gold for every one, which is somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty-eight pounds per gun. The cartridges are to be paid for at the rate of two ounces a hundred, and they cost me fifteen shillings."

Captain Kettle took a pad and made rapid calculation. "That's a bit over £15,000. I give you my best congratulations, sir. That brings you out with a big profit on the venture already. And now I want, if you please, as Captain, to give you a mouthful of advice. When we get that money on board, I want you to let me steam back to Grand Canary and bank it. At the same time I can leave you and the ladies ashore and come back here and finish the job."

"You still think you'd be able to get the *Norman Towers* out even if the people ashore who objected were reinforced by two hundred up-to-date Winchester rifles?"

"Oh, I don't deny that it will make things a bit tougher, sir. But I've said I can do it, and that seems to me the end of the matter. At the same time, I don't mind owning to you that with the ladies off the ship, and safe elsewhere, I shall lose my present nervousness."

Sir George chuckled. "You've only heard half the deal, and when I tell you the rest I

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believe that even you will be convinced that Bergash intends to play fair. It's he, of course, who is buying the cargo. He is going to pay now, as soon as he can send for the gold—which apparently he keeps in his wine cellar, or is it butter-cooler?—and bring it on board here within a couple of days. But by his own suggestion he doesn't take delivery of the rifles and ammunition till we've got the *Norman Towers* out of the lagoon and are ready to sail with her in consort ourselves. Now then, my good Skipper, play on that!"

Captain Kettle thought awhile, and then sighed. "It seems simple. But, by James, to me it looks too simple to be wholesome. There's no denying that the market price of Winchesters up-country in Morocco is a lot more than it is in London or Connecticut, but Mr. Bergash is a man with an English upbringing, and he knows how to get stuff out here if he wants it. Paying seven to eight times their value for Yankee rifles is out of all reason. Why, he could get even those shiftless Grand Canary fishing schooners ro run them across here for half that!"

"I didn't haggle," said Sir George, rather stiffly, "nor did Mr. Bergash. He heard what we'd got, and he just made the offer in round figures, as I've told you. I took it. Perhaps it may throw a little light on the matter if I point out to you that gold has relatively little value up there in the Atlas. They can't eat it, and they don't wear it, and I gather that they can get it by washing out the sands in the local becks with comparatively little labor. As regards a guarantee of good faith, I don't see how he could offer a more conclusive one than proposing to leave the guns in our possession till all chance of using them against us would be over."

"Well, sir, you are owner, and it is for me to carry out your orders. If it doesn't interfere with arrangements, I may tell you that when the moon goes down and all is nice and quiet and dark, I mean to take my gig and slip across the lagoon to where the *Towers* is lying and find out for myself how things exactly are at the moment. The glass shows she hasn't an anchor down, and I've had her against careful shore bearings, and she hasn't budged a foot since we came in here with the *Wongaroo*. Now she was ranging about a bit when we came to reconnoiter in that surfboat."

"Probably she's on the ground. Floated there at high water and stays tight and quiet."

"I'd be easier if she did. I reckon the tide lifts some four feet six or five feet inside here, and if she'd grounded on the top of high water, she'd show two to four feet more side at the bottom of the ebb, according to how soft the bottom was. She doesn't do that. I put the big telescope on her. Poor old Captain Farnish loaded her down with that copper ore to within half an inch of her mark, and she floats at that without so much as a handsbreadth of change. No, Sir George, she's got water under her, and she's not anchored. The tides, both ebb and flood, run round that bight where she is at a good six knots, and still she doesn't move."

"Then she must be tied up in some other way."

"I've thought of a breast-fast, sir, and I went to the foremast head and stood on the eyes of the rigging and steadied the glasses on the truck so that I could see right down on to her decks."

"Well?"

"Her decks are full of litter and muck, but there were no breast-fasts."

"I'm afraid," said Sir George impatiently, "that all this tedious technical detail is a bit beyond me. The *Norman Towers* is there, and you say, afloat, and that's all that really interests me. We'll pull her out when we're ready. In the meanwhile, I can tell you, I am pretty thoroughly satisfied with my bargain about the guns, and the main thing I am concerned in now is to keep Bergash in a good humor, I'm off below for a cup of tea. Come as soon as you're ready."

SIR GEORGE got up and left the charthouse. On the deck outside inquisitive eyes stared at him, but he spoke to no one. He was distinctly ruffled, and hoped to find a more congenial atmosphere below. In the companionway he met his sister. She was white-faced and trembling. He took her arm in a large, firm hand and looked at her curiously.

"Is he hurt?" she asked. "Oh, George, how dreadful! I've only just heard."

"Is who hurt?"

"Captain Kettle."

"He is not. I thought perhaps you were inquiring about one of your dark friends."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Well, several of them are hurt, I gather, pretty badly. Your little Captain must

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needs pick a quarrel with some local boatmen as to whether he should pay ten shillings or a pound for some sheep, and then, when they naturally objected, he proceeds to shoot down about six of them."

"Presumably he was risking his life, and I suppose that's what it amounts to, in your interests?"

"If you call cheeseparing over ten shillings at the risk of upsetting a deal of £15,000 helping my interests, suppose he was."

She stood staring with round eyes over his shoulder. "You think only of your money. And you know he might have been killed—killed! Oh, if he had been!"

Sir George tightened his grip and shook his sister's arm gently. "I say, you know, Violet, you must pull yourself together. I'm quite aware it's only to me, but you're rather giving the show away."

"And do you think I mind? He knows. There's truly no secret about my caring for him. Emily knows, for that matter."

"Emily? Oh, you mean the stewardess. I gather she was engaged to him once."

"I believe she was. It's broken off now. I don't know why, and didn't inquire. I was grateful enough for the bare fact. I want him myself, George, and I mean to have him."

"But I say, old lady, that'll hardly do, you know. Of course, I twigged you were putting in a pretty hard flirtation with the little man, but then of course that's only your way. You always did flirt with everything in trousers that came along ever since you were a six-year-old. Still there are limits to everything, and dash it all, when it comes to cutting out your own maid with her young man, well, I call it bad form!"

"I'll admit what you please, including the flirting. It began with that, I suppose. But it's got past that now. I'm hit. I've never felt this way about any man before, and it's the real thing come at last, George."

"You mean you're really in love with the chap?"

"That's the usual phrase."

"But you can't marry him. He's an awfully decent little fellow in his way, I know, but, dash it all, Violet, do look facts in the face! He isn't our clip. If you want a husband, you absolutely must get one out of your own class. If you've really made up your mind to marry, why don't you whistle up Ingleborough again? He's a very decent sort of chap, and I know he'd have you like a bird. If you married this Kettle, you know perfectly well everybody will cut you."

She plucked away her arm and faced him defiantly. "And do you imagine I'd care? D'you think I'm not heartily sick of the whole crew of them? Anyway, you of all people have a precious small right to give advice on such a subject. You did yourself what you're advising me to do. You married a woman in your own class, and a bonny mess you made of it! You stuck to one another just six months if I recollect my dates aright——"

"A year, you spitfire——"

"Call it that if you like, and for the last three you haven't spent ten nights under the same roof, and only those by the accident of being asked to the same house party. You married according to rule, and I, with your fine example before me, am going to marry to please myself. That is, if he'll have me."

"Oh, dash it all, there can be no question about the man snapping you up, if you're fool enough to chuck yourself away on him."

She laughed rather bitterly. "And you've been boxed up in this wretched little steamer with him all these weeks, and know him no better than that! My dear boy, I'd be the happiest woman in the Northern Hemisphere if I thought Owen would take me this minute, even if I had to go and ask him myself. But as it is, I know he's got nothing but civil words for me—at present—and I believe I'm the most miserable woman now on earth in consequence. It will take something desperate to wake him up to the fact that he can really love me, and I'm getting my scheme in order!"

"What mischief are you up to now?"

"You'll find out when I begin to make use of you. Oh, you needn't scowl at me like a cheap actor. You are all the brother I've got, and you've made a mess of it yourself, and you're past help, or I would give it to you if I could. I am all the sister you have, and I've never asked you for anything big, and now that I've made up my mind what's the one thing in all my life I want and shall ever want, I'm simply going to make you help to get it for me."

"My dear old girl, I'd be very glad to do anything I could for you in reason. But I tell you it's absolutely preposterous of you to think of marrying my Skipper, and frankly you must look upon me as the opposition."

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"All right, George. That's a fair and sportsmanlike warning. Sorry if I rather slopped over just now. But if I want you, don't kick if you find yourself being used. And don't abuse me later on if you find I've run you in for a scheme that's a bit dangerous, when an easier one would have done if you'd offered to help in it decently. There, you may run away up on deck and have your tea up there by yourself. Sorry I can't invite you down whilst I have mine with the Saint and her Majesty. I did suggest it, but the old lady's a great stickler for Moslem etiquette, and it wouldn't do at all for you to come inside our sacred enclosure."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A VISIT TO THE NORMAN TOWERS

THE night overhead and around was covered in with a black velvety darkness unflecked by gleam of moon or glimmer of star, but the top of every wavelet of the lagoon was tipped with pale phosphorescent light, and every oar-stroke stirred up a boil of pallid flame.

Mr. McTodd lit his pipe and hospitably offered a cake of black tobacco and an open clasp-knife to his superior officer. "Cut yourself a fill," he suggested. "We're illuminated like a shop window in Sauciehall Street, and tobacco glow will be lost in the general magnificence."

"I thank you," said Captain Kettle civilly, "but I've had to drop my pipe for professional reasons. But you're quite right about the light. The lagoon's flaring round us like a village fair, and if any one's awake on this side of Africa, and looking out, we're here to be seen. So I'll just follow your example and set fire to a cigar."

"I wish I'd a boiler-plate overcoat like my ancestor, the Crusader, used to wear. The Moors'll be sniping at us presently when we draw within range of their gas-pipes."

"Moors or Berbers. That headman we've got on board, who says he's been to an English College, wants me to believe that the majority of the tribes round here are Berbers, and they're as harmless as the teachers in a Quaker Sunday-school. The only bad men in this section are Moors, according to Bergash."

"Ye needna' explain further. It's always been clear since the creature first stepped up over the side that ye didna like him. Miss Dubbs and I rather fancy him oursel's."

Captain Kettle had a violent comment on the tip of his tongue, but with an effort bit it short and pulled hard at his cigar.

"Vara humorous," said McTodd with a chuckle.

"What's that?" snapped his superior.

"I was just sniggering at ma thoughts, an' the beauty of the night."

"And at what else?"

"Man, I'm no' the pairson to abuse the confidence of a leddy. As a man of the nicest vairtue yoursel', ye couldna expect it of me. Now, could you?"

Captain Kettle tugged at his cigar and stared at the little boat compass, and then stared out at the night.

"Weel, man, I'm fair supprised at you."

"On account of what?"

"To lairn that you've a wish—though you'll no' express it in worrds—that I should repeat to you what the lassie said."

"You'll find yourself over in the ditch amongst the fishes if you don't change your tune."

"If I'd been a financier," chuckled the Scot, "I dare have bet saxpence ye'd have threatened violence like that—or pairpetrated it. Man, Kettle, bend your lug so the hands canna hear. Ye may pluck up your courage. The leddy's conversation is the —— est dull talk I ever had poured into ma confidence. It's all about yourself. And Gosh! man—to starboard and over the quarter—what's yon?"

It was a bonfire, that suddenly flared and spouted up into the sky, and was as suddenly eclipsed by the blackness of the night.

"A flare," said Kettle, "and as they haven't mineral oil down here that I know of, I should say it was somebody firing two handfuls of gunpowder. Well, it means that one nigger, at any rate, is awake and thinking of us, and that's better than being dead and forgotten. Eyes in the boat, men, and attend to your rowing! Mr. McTodd and I are quite capable of looking after our own personal convenience without your unskilled assistance. And, by James, there's an answering flare away up on the mountain!"

"Gosh! it looks as if they're rousing the clans to do us honor. Aweel, I've no immediate use for your rifles—hard work with those rattletraps of engines has left my

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hand no' oversteady. But I've brought along a three-quarter-inch spanner, and if you'll bring the boat up to close quarters, I'll show you how it is used by an expert. Have ye matches? This talking's let my pipe out."

The gig crawled on steadily through the night, stirring lambent flames, and twice more did flares of gunpowder among the foothills of the Atlas call notice to the fact that Africa was awake. Captain Kettle steered by compass alone and (as the current was running strongly) had to make a cast back before he found the *Norman Towers;* and even then, so black was the night, that the noise of his oars scraping along her plates was the first advertisement he had of her nearness.

"Row steady, men!" he ordered, and coasted down her length and then swung the boat under her counter and brought up against the ladder which hung down her farther side. The heavy teak ladder had rungs broken and the davit to which it hung was bent outboard.

"You will stay here," he ordered, "ready to push off when I come back," and with that stepped out on to the grating and ran lightly up the steps and disappeared into the black silence of the night.

PRESENTLY his voice called down in a ghostly whisper from the rail above: "Mr. McTodd, tell the men to pass the boat slowly round to the starboard side. Mind, they're to work her along inch by inch, so as not to stir the phosphorescence, and I will drop them a rope's end overboard to ride to, just level with the break of the bridge deck. D'ye hear me?"

"Aye, aye."

"And do you come up on top here yourself, and bring that spanner you're so proud of."

Mr. McTodd's gait was ungainly, but his oil-soaked slippers made no sound. Also, being a shipman, he knew which way to turn and what to avoid.

"Weel," he said, when he joined his commander, "it's a fine night, and I forget when I enjoyed an evening's prospects more thoroughly. But when's the entertainment to commence?"

"Hold your tongue, Mac, and listen. Listen hard."

Mr. McTodd removed his pipe, opened his mouth and cocked an attentive ear.

"Well, what do you make out?"

"I hear a small slap-slapping of wavelets upon the old girl's skin, and a bit of a sough of the wind, and your breathing, although I reckon you're trying to keep it quiet, and I think there's the yap of a dog—though maybe it's a jackal—somewhere amongst those mountains in the far distance."

"But where are the Moors who should be waiting round the corner to jump out and cut our throats?"

"I can only hear what I telled ye."

"I can make out no more myself. If there were men here in quantity we ought to hear them breathing, or rustling, or coughing. Mac, I believe they've played a game on us. We came here (both of us, I suppose) ready for battle, murder and sudden death, and it's my idea the ship's deserted."

"But we'll go-look-see before I O.K. that," said the cautious Scot.

"And we'll go together, and stand-by ready for trouble. But it's my idea we shall find none."

"Aye," said McTodd, reading his thoughts, "it'll look ugly if they've left her. Weel, we may as well begin where there'll be the worst smell and that's forrard."

Section by section they searched the *Norman Towers.* They went through both firemen's and seamen's forecastle, and found no living soul. Hatches were off, and they peered into the gloom of holds, and into the gassy corners of bunkers. They clattered down the rusted engine-room ladder, and hunted through the shaft-tunnel, pump-alley, boiler-room, and more bunkers. McTodd climbed aloft and investigated dusty corners behind the donkey boiler. They went through messroom, galley, pantries, staterooms; they hunted through more holds. They searched the charthouse and (as a last afterthought) the paint store. And nowhere did they find a single Moor or Berber, alive or dead.

"This is a beggar," said Mr. McTodd.

"One can understand that they would go over every bit of her even more carefully than we have done, and loot right and left. But the astonishing thing to me is first the amount of dirt they have brought on board, and second, why they should have left it practically all in one track. The decks below were comparatively clean, and they don't seem to have been paddling about particularly in the cabins for instance, or the

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engine-room. But from the port gangway over yonder there are two lines of mud and stone splinters going forward and aft, and then going thwart-ships as soon as there's a chance, and then promenading the whole length of the port side."

McTODD scraped a match, stooped down, and stirred the deposit with his finger. "There's too much here for them to have brought aboard stuck between their toes or smeared on their sandals. There's enough depth of mud on these decks, Skipper, to grow oats, and it looks good, dark, chocolate-colored, fertile soil, too, if one raked out some of the splinters of stone."

"That rock they were quarrying from, and which we can't see in this darkness, is chocolate-colored, too. Can you see the loom on the shore line, Mac? How far do you make it away from the ship's side?"

"I should say a *kherb's* length."

"That's exactly my idea. The shore here's steep-to, and she lies in deep water close to it."

"She's as still as if she was docked."

"She is in a dock, I do believe. I've an idea they've lifted that stone, lump by lump, upon their shoulders, carried it down the beach, towed in a big *kherb* to act as floating gangway, carried it along that and up the side—and that's how that big teak ladder got broken, by a rock falling on it. Then they've shouldered it over the decks here, dropping bits by the way; and then they've pitched it over the port side into the lagoon. There were hundreds of them, and there were thousands upon thousands of tons of the stone. They were quarrying it during all the days and, under cover of the nights they were tipping it over the *Tower's* port rail and building up a dock wall of rubble from the lagoon floor to pen her. By James, Mac, I was boasting to Sir George not many hours back that I would pull the old boat out of here in spite of all the Berbers in Africa, and I've never yet broken my word. Man and boy, I've done a good many things to be ashamed of, but telling lies is not one of them, and it looks as if here I've made a commencement."

"Man, I'm vara afraid you're right. What's that you're doing?"

"Stripping. I'm going overboard to make sure."

"Hold you," said the Scot, "I'm the better diver of the two, as we've proved already, and those ducks ashore are still signaling to one another with gunpowder flares in the local Morse code. If there's trouble, the hands in the boat will take advice better from you than from me."

Owen Kettle, Master of the S.S. *Wongaroo*, was the last man on earth to take what practically amounted to an order from one of his own underlings, and I merely record this one instance in which he let Mr. McTodd have his own way to show how badly he was hit by the discovery he had just made. He had boasted—yes, it amounted to that—bragged (as he told himself bitterly) that he could do a certain thing, and behold! it had become impossible. He had been confident in the skill and strength of his own right arm, in the breadth of his resourcefulness, in the force of his own brazen courage, and behold! a set of cunning savages had made the feat he had promised to perform a physical impossibility. Savages? Yes, but from the very start he had always held to a suspicion that there was a white man at the back of the active hive, directing them. White man? Why not that dog of an infidel, Sidi Mohammed Bergash?

Captain Kettle had come to believe in his own instincts, and openly and frankly he had mistrusted this Moor or Berber, or whatever he was, with the English education, ever since he had seen him for the first time ride up along the beach and sit on a horse that straddled out its legs as though it were standing to be photographed in a show ring.

He slid down a rope into the boat, and waited for Mr. McTodd. That expert reappeared on the surface from time to time, took in air supplies, kicked up his heels and disappeared to make further explorations.

Finally, he swam with a vigorous side-stroke back to the boat, jerked himself up to her stern, and stepped in-board.

"Ye may get back home, Captain," said he, reaching for his clothes, "as fast as ye like. The survey of the sea floor's clearly mapped in my head. And I may say the contours are—well, are as ye surmised—or worse. Gosh, and they say in the schoolbooks that I was brought up on in Ballindrochater that it's to ants we're to look up as the most industrious animals on the face of the globe. Well, after to-night's experience, I shall just have to write a postscript.

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It's prodigious the work these pagans must have put in. How's the tide?"

"An hour past flood."

"Weel, there's a bank of stone rubble down there wide enough to carry a railroad. It's a matter of twelve feet down below the water surface now, and I should say is just nicely covered at the bottom of the ebb. But it runs up to the rock ahead, and to the shoal water astern, and I guess friend Bergash and his clansmen have got the *Norman Towers* fixed here as firmly as if they'd got her bolted down into the bed plate of Africa and lock-nutted through to China below!"

CHAPTER XXIX

MISS CHESTERMAN FORCES THE PACE

NERVOUSNESS in Mr. Trethewy, the Mate of the *Wongaroo*, found outward expression in his upper lip and nose. Always when spoken to he answered with a twitch of these organs, and even when stared at, his nose which was of a fine Roman mold, would respond, in spite of all its wearer's most strenuous efforts to appear unconcerned. He was fully aware of his failing, and utterly impotent to cure it, and if ever a man carried a daily cross in the sight of all men, Trethewy wore his in the middle of his face.

It was this officer then who met his fellow officers of the reconnoitering party at the *Wongaroo's* gangway, and for a while he was so violently contorted by his complaint that speech was altogether beyond him.

There were moments when Captain Kettle, who had small enough patience with this sort of thing, deliberately barked at the man until he straightened his lip and spoke. But on this particular occasion he saw there was news, and dreaded what it might be. He let his Mate down as lightly as he knew how. He took the cigar from his lips, said quietly "Yes, Mr. Trethewy?" and waited. With a supreme effort he did not even stare at the man, but swung his eyes to the lagoon, which was now flecked with phosphorescence where the tiny breakers were whipped up by the land breeze, and waited.

"They're gone," said the Mate when at length he had thawed out sufficiently to speak.

"Who have gone?"

The junior was stricken with another spasm worse than the first, and Captain Kettle noted that practically the whole of both watches were stowed away in the shadows on deck, keenly listening. "Now then, Mr. Trethewy, get on, man, get on. Who have gone?"

"The caboodle of them," the Mate blurted. "O-o-owner, sister, and decorative maid. If only you wouldn't hustle a man so, sir; I could tell you all right. That dark chap with the white-man frills has gone with them. Saint, I think you call him, but as nobody's introduced me to him, I can't ping-ping-ping-ping say. I'm not the sort of officer who sucks information about passengers' guests out of the steward. I tried to stop 'em and couldn't, and if you think my conduct's unsatisfactory, sir, you may sign me off at the next port we touch at, and I'll not com-ping-ping-plain."

"But, Great James, man, where have they gone?"

"On a cir-circular tour round Africa for anything I know. I did ask Miss. I—I—I said I hoped it wouldn't rain, and they'd find the roads good, and where were they going? But she ping-ping couldn't hear me. Then I asked Sir George and he told me straight enough to mind my own—ping—bally business. As for that stuck-up maid——"

"If you don't take care of your language," said Kettle furiously, "I'll fling you overboard, you blooming lump of incompetence! I leave you in charge of a steamboat at anchor for a matter of three hours, and as soon as my back is turned you capsize every arrangement I have made!"

This was obviously unfair, and the Mate, who was in reality a young man of spirit, had every intention of entering a vigorous protest, but his infirmity descended on him with renewed vigor, and left him doubly tongue-tied and defenseless under his superior officer's tornado of words.

"Go to your room, sir!" Kettle finished up furiously. "Where's Mr. Forster?"

"Second Mate's turned in, sir," a voice from the darkness volunteered, and without further words Captain Kettle walked off briskly below to the officers' quarters under the break of the poop.

The fat old second mate was either fast asleep or was shamming to be in that condition. Kettle, however, shook him without qualms. "Wake!" he snapped. And when the second Mate, who was a stupid man and prided himself on his stupidity,

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opened one eye only, and that with extreme care, Captain Kettle took two hands to him and shook with such fine vigor that there could be no doubt about sleep fleeing before such an onslaught.

"Now then, hear me. Were you on deck when these people went away?"

"Yes."

"And made no effort to stop them?"

"No."

"Do you know where they've gone?"

"No."

"Did you hear them say anything about their plans?"

"No."

"Did you see which direction they took when they got ashore?"

"No. If that's all the information you want, this is my watch below, and I wish to sleep."

"Oh, do you?" said Captain Kettle. "Well, if you want me to put hands on you again, you'd better try and do it! I've just sent the Mate to his room. So you're Mate, and you'd better go on deck and stand your watch."

"I thank you for the promotion, but do not want it. I dislike responsibility. I hold a master's ticket, as you know, and I tried using it once for six months, but never no more. It's second mate for me to the end of my days at sea, and I'm not going to be hustled into anything bigger."

"If you don't go on deck," the little sailor snarled at him, "I'll kick you there! And if you don't do duty when you are on deck, I'll disrate you, and send you below to trim coals, and promote one of the ash-cats to be Mate in your place! Now, will you budge?"

"I suppose I have to, if you put it that way. But I—*mumble, mumble, mumble.*"

He hoisted his fat hairy legs over the edge of the bunk and dropped on deck; slowly he found slippers, an ulster, and a uniform cap, and went out of his room still grumbling. Captain Kettle, with twitching fingers, followed at his heels.

"You will set an anchor watch of six hands, and have them report to you every half bell."

"Aye."

"Let the rest of the hands turn in. I shall want them early."

"Aye, aye."

"Take accurate bearings of any lights you may see ashore. Is your log written up?"

"Not quite up to date, sir. There might be——"

"Bring it to me after breakfast to-morrow filled up to breakfast time. And Mr. Forster?"

"Aye?"

"If I hear of or see any shore flare that you don't report accurately, by James, I'll send you to your room and see that your ticket's endorsed for incompetency! That'll do."

"APPEAR to been joying yourself," said McTodd when a very worried Kettle let himself into the chart-house.

"You see the hopeless material I have to work on."

"It's only the fools that come to sea," said the Scot sententiously. "You and me are the exceptions. There was a letter in my room put in the tumbler-rack with a whisky-bottle as paperweight. I wonder why."

"To ensure its being seen. How was it addressed?"

"To you. It's there, under the parallel rulers on the chart table. And I've brought you a tot of the whisky."

Captain Kettle tore and read:

MY DEAR SKIPPER: There's a devil of a mess. My sister, who you'll know by this time is quite unaccountable to anybody for her movements, took it into her head as soon as you had left the ship to go ashore with old Mrs. Bergash and her retinue. They've got the stewardess with them. I didn't know what had happened till I by accident came on deck and saw them riding off on camels up over the sand dunes at the back of the beach, and presumably making for the mountains. They'd got the body-guard in attendance, and the camp followers were striking camp for all they were worth. The Saint saw what had happened the same time I did, and to give him his due seemed considerably rattled. It was, according to him, Kismet, and all the rest of it; but he obviously didn't like the look of things one little bit. He said I must remember that the customs and appliances in his fortress were much the same as they had been in the days of ancient Rome, and my sister would find them abominably crude and savage. The one thing to do (by his way of thinking) is to head her off. So we're just starting for the shore for that purpose. There are horses still at their pickets. Rely on it we shall get back as soon as we can.

"Yes, I guarantee they will. My James, what a mess! I knew there was something hanging over us, and that's what it is."

"There's another word or two of the letter."

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"Oh, yes. He says:

"I hope you found all well on the *Norman Towers*. If there's any hitch, I'm sure you will find the Saint is only too anxious to assist. So please treat him with decent civility when next you meet.

"Yours, G. C. H. C. CHESTERMAN."

"I shall treat that wrongly-educated African exactly as he deserves when I catch him. Mac?"

"I'm listening."

"I'm going ashore—now. I shall take a rifle and a bag of biscuit and a bottle of Horner's Perfect Cure and follow on the trail of that caravan and see what happens. If I'm wanted, I shall be there. If the unlikely happens, and all goes well, I'll be free to let any one who feels inclined that way to kick me—if he can. I leave you in charge here, not because you're certificated, not because you're competent, but because you're the best man out of the bad lot on board."

"Man, your compliments overwhelm me."

"As a favor I ask you to give the whisky a miss, and keep your end up."

"Drunk or sober, I can do that last with the crowd on board here. But being now in a position of vast responsibility, I want all points made clear to me in case I have to make a choice. If it's a case of losing you or losing the owner, which do I take?"

"The owner, by James, every time, because he is the owner. And anyway I can look after myself."

"Does that include his sister?"

"I guess they'll have to come level."

"And the other girl? There could be no call to give special attention to a mere leddy's maid, especially when the Skipper is sweet on the mistress."

"Mac," said Captain Kettle, quietly for him, "I've got about as much as I can carry. What that no-color beast of a Saint may be up to, I shiver to think of. But make no doubt about my own sentiments toward the two ladies. Miss Chesterman is one of the owners and has my fullest respect. Miss Dubbs, if God is very good to me, I want some day again to make my sweetheart."

"Aye, being a pairson of penetration mysel', that's been clear to me for some time. But I hae my doobts if it's been as clear to the parties concerned in the business as principals. As to your going alone into those mountains on their trail, it strikes me as the worst kind of foolishness, and the very thing that blackguard of a Saint is probably looking out for; but I ken fine ye're too mule-heided to be turned from your plan, so I'll e'en spare ma eloquence. I'll just pack my own sidearms and come with you."

"Mr. McTodd," said Kettle stiffly, "I've admitted you to some familiarities, and now you're inclined to encroach. Kindly note I'm master on this packet. I leave you on board here, as I say, in charge, and if you fail to keep a sharp lookout night and day, the Moors will take her from you as sure as the Lord made little apples. I shall be away for the shore myself in ten minutes."

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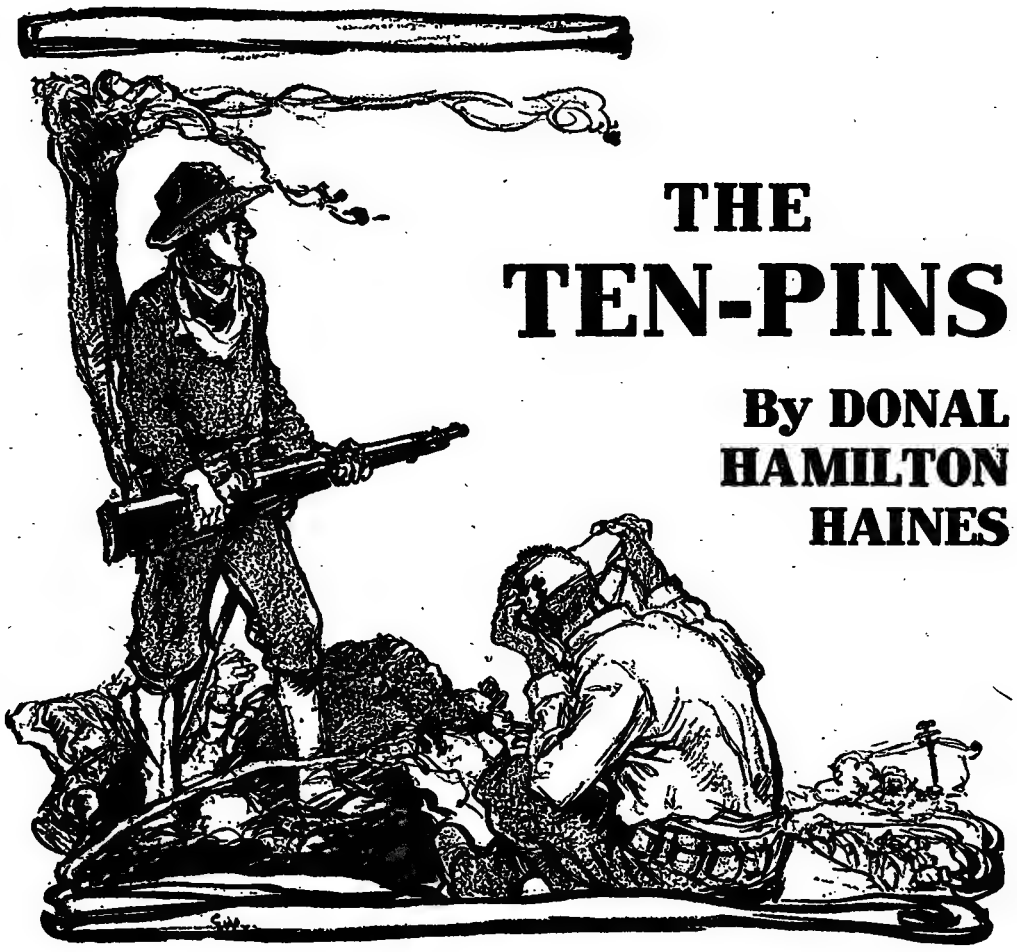

THE TEN-PINS

By DONAL HAMILTON HAINES

LIEUTENANT LYNCH sat on the hot, sandy railroad embankment sewing his new shoulder-straps to the soiled shoulders of his brown shirt. The night before it had been "Sergeant Lynch," but a "slug," bitten and chewed into an ugly missile, had hissed into camp in the night and snuffed out the life of Cafferty, the second lieutenant.

The company knew where that slug had come from—and Cafferty had been popular. The Captain, a lean, silent man who said little or nothing, but acted with the unexpected quickness of some silent people, said briefly,

"We'll get those snipers to-day!"

There was keen joy in every bungling stitch which Lynch's clumsy fingers put into the cloth on his knees, for to the tall, dark-haired young officer the company stood for the beginning and end of all earthly things. The very caption, B Company, 18th Regular Infantry, was all the written creed that Lynch possessed, and his code of ethics comprised simply the keeping of the company in its position as the "crack" company of a good regiment. He had come up from the ranks, and the traditions and frailties of the company were his household gods. And now that he had actually entered into the sacred ranks of the commissioned officers, Lynch was fairly awed by his position. The ill-sewed straps of rank were to him as the signs of a high order of priesthood.

And here on the first day of his leadership he was to have his chance for the very sort of work the company liked. Brooks, the lean Captain, had promised that they should

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go after the enemy's snipers and avenge Cafferty. It was because B Company was at its best in such work that they lay where they did, far from the bulk of their own army, like a slender thorn in the enemy's flank.

The company was a collection of men with long, tireless legs, steady hands and keen eyes. They could march their three miles an hour for eight hours, and shoot like fresh troops at the end of the hike, nor would there be any stragglers along the line of their going. It was rumored in the regiment that they could go farther than a camel without water, and that they needed no baggage train because they ate only when there was nothing else to be done. Altogether, they were too good to be buried in the mass of a great army, and were set far out toward the end of one of the army's great feelers.

Lynch finished the last unsightly stitch, snapped the thread and looked ruefully at his pricked forefinger. He slipped into the brown shirt, with a shy glance at the new straps, and strode back up the bank. On the other side of the tracks, in the shelter of a high bank, the company was shaking itself into readiness for the punitive expedition. They were a dirty-looking lot, the only thing clean about them was their guns, the only sign of uniformity a total lack of any color save the dingy brown of shirts, trousers, hats and leggings. They had even stained the buttons on their jackets, their belt buckles and the few inches of barrel which protruded beyond the wooden casings of their rifles. The company could have thrown themselves on their faces and gone unnoticed by any one save a man in a balloon.

Captain Brooks came to the top of the embankment and looked at the sun without bothering for his watch.

"We'll start now," he announced briefly to Lynch.

The line of brown figures moved off down the curving line of the railroad, the men walking with a long, swinging stride, making no effort to keep step, and carrying their rifles at whatever angle suited their individual tastes. Twenty men had gone on ahead of the bulk of the company, spread across its front in a line half a mile wide, the men forty or fifty yards apart. After the main body was well on its way, another clump of figures which had been standing on the railroad embankment scattered across the rear and upon the flanks. B Company always acted as though the whole of the enemy's force had been put upon its trail.

Brooks and Lynch walked side by side at the head of the main body; Roberts, the first lieutenant, was ahead with the skirmishers. Brooks walked with a smooth, tireless stride, his face expressionless, his eyes on the ground. Lynch strode with the air of a man in a hurry to do something pleasant. His fingers kept toying with the scarred hilt of the sword Cafferty had worn the day before, and his eye snapped with enthusiasm as he saw two of the distant skirmish-line, silhouetted for an instant on the top of a hill against the sky-line, as they nosed about a suspicious-looking thicket which might hide something sinister. Brooks glanced up at his new lieutenant and noted the shoulder-straps with a faint, somewhat cynical smile.

"I see you're labeled, Lynch," he remarked.

Lynch half-turned in surprise, and then flushed.

"Yes, sir," he replied in some embarrassment. The Captain shook his head.

"It's foolish," he said. "Those two little spots of yellow will show at a hundred yards. Better hurry and get 'em soiled."

LYNCH walked forward a few paces in silence, manifestly wishing to say something but hesitating to speak. Brooks's face was not one that invited confidences. Finally Lynch threw up his head with a boyish air of defiance:

"I don't want to hide 'em," he said firmly. "I'm proud of 'em. It's something to be an officer in a company like this."

Brooks shrugged his thin shoulders.

"It's being above a hundred other men who might be above you," he admitted. "That's always comforting to a man's vanity."

Lynch waited before replying until he had watched the two distant brown figures against the sky-line finish their inspection of the thicket and melt into nothingness against the background.

"I don't mean that," he answered. "I'd rather be the youngest private in B Company than command some regiments I've seen."

Brooks made no answer, and Lynch

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glanced apprehensively at his superior's face. The Captain seemed to have lost interest in the discussion, and Lynch felt nettled.

"They're a great lot," he went on eagerly, "that can shoot and march and fight like no other hundred men on top of earth. And I've known every one of 'em, sir, ever since they've been in the company. They're all the family I've got. They aren't like other companies—why, you must feel that, sir!" he finished, with a note of appeal in his voice.

Both men half turned and glanced over their shoulders at the straggling line behind them. The infantrymen were plodding swiftly but easily, the gravel between the ties crunching beneath their heavy shoes.

"Where'll you find another company with twenty men in it that can shoot through a port every time at three hundred yards?" demanded Lynch in growing excitement. "Or one that can stop half a regiment the way we did at Briscoe last month? Why, sir, there's not another bunch like 'em—anywhere!"

But Brooks only walked steadily forward, the same trace of a smile on his thin lips. The column kept to the railroad around a long curve and halted as the protecting timber and rising ground fell back from the right of way, until a distant pigmy figure in brown signaled them that they could cross the broad, treeless plain before them in safety. Then they scrambled down the embankment, opened out their column and went on across the fields.

"You're young, Lynch," Brooks said suddenly as they swung down from the top of a rail fence, "even if you have been in the ranks a good while. War's a business—or a game—but not a game that's played for fun, or to look pretty. These men here"— and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder without turning—"are just ten-pins, that's all. Maybe there's a bit better wood in them than some others, but their time'll come. We'll hit something too big for us sometime, and we'll get bowled over, and there'll be an end of us. A dead good soldier is no prettier than a dead bad one. Go back and close up the rear guard, Lieutenant. I think we're getting close to something."

Lynch walked swiftly back past the uneven clumps of men until he came to where the first flankers should have been, only to find that his sharp eyes could find no moving brown figures against the distant cover. He scowled and pushed ahead, glancing around at the little company behind him. He started across a field of rye, with a hill covered by scrubby bushes on one side, second-growth timber on another and a marsh stretching around the far end. Halfway across it he suddenly saw a brown uniform against one of the fence-posts. He paused; the brown figure turned and Lynch saw the red face of Corporal Kane. The latter gestured frantically and Lynch, dropping to his knees, crawled quickly to where the non-commissioned officer squatted.

"They're behint us Lyn—Lieutenant," whispered Kane in a dry voice. "God knows how they got there! There wasn't a man in a mile of us last night. Why——"

"Where?" snapped Lynch.

Kane hitched a trifle closer to the rail fence and pointed through the tangle of low willows and sumach. Lynch craned his neck, and his eyes widened. He could look across a broad, slightly-rolling field, and on the other side of it, half a mile or more distant, he saw a long, undulating line of men in grayish white, the bayonets of their rifles glittering above their heads.

"There's cavalry over there, too," whispered Kane.

"Where are the rest of our men?" demanded Lynch.

"Watchin', part of 'em, the rest fallin' back on the main force," explained Kane tersely.

Lynch looked again with all his eyes. There were fully five hundred of the enemy in sight, and there were sinister-looking clouds of dust in the road beyond them.

"Get your detail together and fall back—under cover," commanded Lynch, then he doubled back across the field, bending low as he ran through the waving, rustling grain. A dozen yards beyond the rail fence which he and Brooks had crossed side by side a few moments earlier, he found a dozen of his own men piling the rails in front of them and burrowing in the ground with their short, stubby bayonets. He stopped astride the topmost rail and looked at them in amazement.

"Skirmishers encountered the enemy in front in force," explained one of the men with a half-careless, wholly graceful salute.

"Where's Captain Brooks?" demanded Lynch. The men pointed to the field be-

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yond, where Brooks was quietly directing the rapid preparation of an old stone wall for defense. Lynch hurried to his side.

"The enemy is in force behind us, Captain," he said in even tones.

Brooks turned around with the mild interest of a man who has been told that it is going to rain.

"Never mind the wall," he said to the hurrying soldiers.

THE two officers glanced at each other, but Lynch did not meet his captain's eye squarely, fearing to read what he might see there. Both of them looked around hastily for the most defensible spot within reach. They could see the slender lines of their advance party and rear-guard moving slowly back on them, the course of the cautious men marked only by the occasional appearance of a brown slouch hat and the steady waving of the grain.

There was no need of orders. Officers and men alike saw quite clearly that the wooded hill on the edge of the rye-field was the only point at which a stand could possibly be made. At the double, the main body angled back toward the green slopes, and behind them came Roberts, more slowly, his men facing the forces they had encountered in front.

The hill rose from the surrounding fields to a height of perhaps two hundred feet, its western slope facing the straight line of the railroad, with three fields of knee-high corn between its foot and the ballasted roadbed. The eastern slope dropped away more sharply, and was farther protected by a wide, reedy lake. Along the crest and most of the slopes grew scattered clumps of second growth hickory and maple, with an occasional sturdy old oak. The ground was covered with thick grass and a tangle of low bushes and creeping vines.

As far as the officers were able to see, the gray-white lines of the enemy were on three sides of them—beyond the rye-field to the south, on the other side of the railroad and along the farther shores of the lake. Half way up the slope Lynch turned to look for Kane's squat figure. He saw Kane kneeling in the middle of the field, and as he watched, a man in a dirty white jacket and a dark cap climbed to the top of the rail fence and stood with one hand shielding his eyes. Kane's rifle rose slowly and the sharp report woke a hundred echoes. The white figure collapsed slowly, and Kane ran back with the air of a boy who has broken a window and been seen in the act.

The single shot, the first of the tense morning, seemed to break the ghostly silence of the enemy's advance. There were distant calls sounding across the fields, and clear bugles sounded from beyond the railroad. A sputter of fire broke out beyond the rail fence where Kane's quarry lay in the grass. Lynch hurried up the hill to where the slender lines of defense were being formed.

B Company's manners in action had always been a puzzle to divisional commanders and such dignitaries. The officers seemed to have nothing to do but watch. The men took care of themselves, receiving orders only when they went wrong. Brooks had once been accused of having mapped out the tactics of his men for a decade to come and made them commit the same to memory. Everything worked smoothly and in silence; a line of forty men, with Lynch a few paces behind it, strung itself under cover along the western slope just far enough below the actual crest so that they were not in sight from the other side.

The intervals between the men were large enough to permit perfect freedom in firing, and close enough for the men to bunch against a rush. On the other slope, where the attack was not so likely to be pushed with vigor, was another line of twenty men; while the rest of the company edged the two end slopes. Brooks lay flat on his face in the long grass on the very crest of the hill, his binoculars in one hand, his revolver in the other. His sword hung by a loop from the hand that held the glasses. Ten minutes before, the company had been scurrying in what appeared to be frantic haste from an untenable position; now they lay quietly, carefully posted in the best position to be found.

Brooks looked down at Lynch, who was on his knees behind a low stump twenty feet down the hill.

"The bowling's starting, Lynch," he called softly. "Watch our gallant tenpins!"

Lynch did not even turn his head, but under his breath he cursed softly and watched the railroad embankment with all his eyes.

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Kane's accurate shot, followed by complete silence seemed to have puzzled the enemy. Their advance hesitated on all sides, then they raked the empty rye-field with crashing volleys from the other side of the fence, while the brown infantry above watched them silently.

"Let 'em alone 'till they cross the fence," cautioned Roberts.

On the railroad side, the enemy was less cautious. A long line of the white jackets came suddenly into view against the green of the timber behind them. Lynch caught his breath as the splendid targets showed, but before he had time to give an order, the forty rifles spat and spat again. The white line melted back into the shelter of the ditch, leaving many white figures lying between the shining rails. Along the line of the forty sounded the clatter of breech-bolts and the tinkle of empty shells. Lynch counted the white figures on the embankment.

"Sixteen!" he marveled. "And it's a good two hundred and fifty yards. Lord, how they can shoot!"

From the other side of the hill came the rattle of rifles which ceased abruptly. Evidently the accuracy of the company's fire had served the same purpose in both directions. In the sharp silence which followed the first volleys Lynch heard the clear tones of a man whistling. He jerked his head around to see Brooks leaning on his elbows, whistling the Dead March from "Saul."

THE enemy on the railroad side learned its lesson quickly. They had no more taste for fronting those merciless rifles in the open. Instead of walking upright, they crawled to the top of the embankment, where they opened a crackling fire, lying on the ground behind the rails.

"Watch the ends of the line!" cautioned Lynch. "Look out for a rush to cover!"

Even on the ground the white jackets were excellent marks, and the company made its shots tell. Five minutes of this uneven dueling convinced the enemy that he could not maintain a standstill fight from the railroad, and the scattering fire which had clipped leaves and twigs from the trees over Lynch's head died out suddenly.

Kane, completely hidden behind the bole of a sturdy hickory, grinned over his shoulder at Lynch and chuckled with delight.

"I got five!" he confessed, and held up five empty shells. Lynch's heart swelled into his throat.

"Bully!" he said in a shaky tone, "keep it up, Billy! We can hold a million of 'em!"

There followed a period of disconcerting silence, with only a few of the enemy firing spasmodically. Lynch wriggled up the hill to Brooks' side.

"Anybody hit?" he asked. Brooks pointed toward a sumach bush, beneath which lay two still figures.

"Those two," he said, "and Roberts seems to have been winged."

He said it in the cheerful, careless tone of a man telling the time of day, and Lynch crawled back to his stump with a feeling of hot anger. He found Kane with his head lifted above the grass peering at the screen of woods beyond the track. There was a steady stream of bullets coming from these woods. They went high enough to miss the prostrate men, but they made movement impossible.

"They're aimin' to rush us," decided Kane, and Lynch nodded.

The fire from the woods increased in volume. Lynch could not see the open stretch between the timber and the embankment, but he guessed that files of crouching white figures were slipping forward for the charge, and his fingers tightened on the butt of his revolver.

"Captain sent ten of us over from the other side," said a voice in his ear. "Nothin' doin' over there. They can't wade the marsh around the lake."

Lynch watched the ten brown shapes lose themselves in the cover as noiselessly and completely as the wood-creatures. Again his breast heaved with the pride he took in them. He could have stopped the rush with the men he had; now he could crumple it!

There was a crashing volley from the woods, a wild yell and the white lines topped the embankment, paused for another volley and ran on across. Two hundred yards down the line in each direction the white lines were winged by solid bunches of men.

"Get the masses first!" yelled Lynch, springing to his feet; "we'll tend to the rest of 'em when they get close!"

A tearing magazine fire bit deep into the white lines, and the masses at the end of the line were knocked about as though by the blows of a great club, but the hurrying

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figures swept down the embankment and into the young corn. As they came, another line flashed into sight on the top of the embankment, fired wildly and clattered down after the first. Lynch had a feeling of helplessness; he had only fifty rifles with which he could stop this flood of pale figures. He had a desire to run out and stop as many as he could with his hands. Kane's voice steadied him.

"Lord!" exclaimed the fat corporal as he worked at his bolt, "what a picnic!"

Lynch became conscious that Brooks' revolver was exploding withing a few feet of his ear. He had emptied his own weapon at the figures in the corn and was stuffing fresh cartridges into the reeking cylinder. On all sides of him the fifty were firing as only seasoned troops can fire. The enemy were too thoroughly occupied with getting over the ground as fast as possible to pause for a reply, and the covering volleys from the woods had ceased for fear of hitting their own men.

Some of the foremost of the enemy were actually at the foot of the slope, but the second line, which had caught the full force of the company's fire, sagged weakly in the center and then broke back over the embankment. A moment only the first line stood amid the yells and bullets of the defenders, then they melted back, while the stinging volleys raked them from the rear.

Lynch found himself panting as though he had thrown back the charge by his own physical strength, and the blood hammered wildly in his temples. He glanced at Brooks.

"Well," said the Captain calmly, "that gives us half an hour more fun!"

A soldier crashed over the hill and stopped panting in front of the two men.

"We can't hold the south side, sir!" he gasped. "The Lieutenant's shot through the lungs, and there's only three of us left!"

"That much for our heroism!" said Brooks. "Take Kane and half a dozen men and go over there, Lynch. When they're gone, send for more. I'll send 'em as long as there are any, but 'the best of us all go under,' you know!"

Lynch led the little file into a perfect rain of lead on the south side of the hill. The enemy, hidden behind the rail fence beyond the rye-field where Kane had dropped the first victim, made the most of the cover and shot slowly and well.

"This is diff'rent," said Kane soberly, as he built himself a tiny shelter of earth and stones and put a heap of shining, brass cartridges where he could reach them easily.

IT WAS different. Lynch knew that in an instant as he kept his face turned from the bodies of Roberts and his men. The enemy intended to flay the hill until it was too weak to stop them, and then rush. There was no undertone of expectancy here, no line of white marks, only the spitting line of the fence and the occasional flash of a dirty white patch as an incautious arm or shoulder showed.

The enemy's bullets pelted steadily, crackling through the branches, thumping into the trees and caroming off the rocks. There was no break in the whistling sound of their flight—and all that Lynch and his nine men could do was to sit still and strike back when opportunity offered. Lynch drove himself to take a rifle and cartridge belt from the hands of a dead man, and the work of snapping out the shells and flinging bullets at the distant fence made him feel better.

Behind him he heard the wild crashing and shouting of the enemy's second rush across the railroad, and his nerves seemed to squirm until the diminishing fire told him that the survivors of the fifty had sent the white lines scurrying back to cover once more. He looked toward the top of the hill, and saw Brooks looking down at him, making a trumpet of his hands.

"Fire twenty rounds apiece at those chaps as fast as you can," called the Captain, "and then come over here. We'll need all we've got in a minute!"

Twenty slashing little volleys splintered the rails of the enemy's fence and stretched out half a dozen figures behind it, then the ten men slipped like weasels through the brush and crawled back into the thinning ranks of the fifty. Lynch saw that the enemy's dead were now visible half-way up the slopes.

"We just held 'em and that's all," explained Brooks languidly. "We'll hold 'em with the bayonet next time—maybe, and then they'll get us. It's been rather a pretty tussle."

Lynch lay in the grass breathing deeply. He counted the little blue jets of vapor which marked the position of the men. There were thirty-two where there had

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been fifty. So the next charge was to blot them out! B Company, Eighteenth Regular Infantry, would become a name only. Cafferty and Roberts were gone—and now it would be the rest of them, Brooks, Kane, Murphy, Hildreth—every one of the familiar faces and figures to lie still like the brown shapes on the south slope and in the grass about him!

"Ah!" breathed Brooks at his side.

A dirty white cloud seemed to roll across the embankment. There were more of the enemy this time, and they did not pause to fire. They came steadily, their heads bowed to the punishing metal, their guns held stiffly with the bayonets in the sockets. The thirty-two rifles took their toll once as the enemy topped the embankment, a second time as they slid and scrambled down its steep sides, and again and again as they staggered across the corn-fields and on to the foot of the slope.

"It's the steel this time," muttered Lynch as he fired his revolver at an officer, half turned toward his own men at the foot of the hill.

Disdaining cover, the hostile lines breasted the uneven hillside, never firing a shot in reply, but climbing steadily. The men above them could pick the exact spot on a man's figure to plant their shots, and few of the white figures moved after they fell. Again Lynch felt himself overpowered by a sense of helplessness. The white lines would not stop; it was like shooting at a snow-storm. Then a blond officer with a shining yellow medal on the white breast of his coat leveled a black revolver at him across the shattered stump of a birch. The bullet whistled past Lynch's cheek, and he jumped forward, lunging at the blond man with the dead private's bayonet. There was an awful confusion of brown and white figures, the sounds of a terrifying hand-to-hand struggle that was like the scuffling and snarling of fighting dogs.

Lynch, swinging the nine-pound rifle by the barrel, struck at the forms which loomed before him as a man strikes at the unshaped terrors of a dream. He felt a hot stab of pain in his shoulder, another somewhere in his leg; a clubbed gun thumped against his arm, and his own weapon crashed against the man who had struck him. He pulled back his arm to strike again to find that there were no more white figures about him; between him and the railroad there were only motionless shapes.

Off to the sides, ragged fringes of the attack were cowering back into shelter. He saw his own men staring unbelievingly at the retreating foe, too exhausted to fire or to shout, their faces looking as though they were still staring at the death that they had pushed back.

FOR an instant Lynch stood upright, his gun hanging from his nerveless arms. He saw Kane, tying a bandage around his head, Brooks, lying on his back with his eyes closed, but breathing. The woods beyond the railroad were silent; only in the direction of the rail fence the enemy's rifles were still crackling.

Brooks opened his eyes.

"Are they coming back yet?" he asked weakly. "Or are the ten-pins all down but you?"

Lynch shook his head, when there was a sudden, deafening report and a scarlet flash above the woods across the tracks. A distant boom sounded menacingly.

"Guns!" said Brooks, and closed his eyes again.

But Lynch bent his head forward with cheeks gone suddenly pale. A second shell crashed through the trees and roared into fragments. Then a third followed it, and off to the south came a furious rattle of rifles and the thumping of another gun. A white figure dashed to the top of the embankment, waved his arm and fled back. Bugles in the woods commenced calling wildly; the banging fire to the south increased and more shells droned over head and burst farther away.

Lynch flung both hands in the air with a wild yell, then whirled on the wounded Captain at his feet.

"I knew it!" he shouted. "It's our guns! The army's found us. Ten-pins, are we, ten-pins! We've licked an army—old B Company's licked an army, that's what it's done, and it's here yet!"

And Lieutenant Lynch, his eyes not on the first scurrying brown figures of the rescuing force down the railroad, but on the tired, triumphant men around him, reached up and patted the clumsily sewed straps on his broad shoulders.

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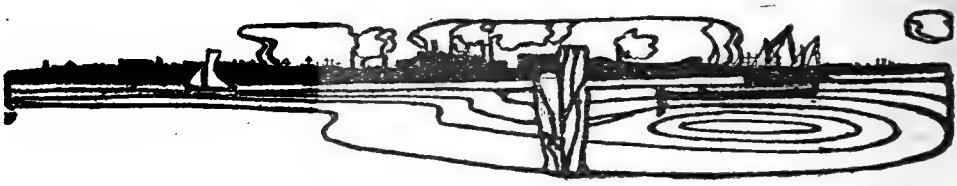

THE PACKET BOAT*

BY BERTON BRALEY

NEVER no rest,
Never no sleep!
Say, it would make
Any Chinaman weep.
Pull outa dock,
Lie down an' snooze,
Land in another, an'
"No time to lose!"
Hustle the freight out like devils possessed—
Never no sleep, never no rest.

Never no rest,
Never no sleep!
Say, but they're gettin' us
Easy an' cheap;
Loadin' all day an'
Unloadin' all night,
Hittin' the hay
By the dawn's early light;
Then comes the mate an' we hops from our nest—
Never no sleep, never no rest.

Never no rest,
Never no sleep!
Stop every port
An' unload in a heap.
Deckhands we be,
An' dock-wollopers too—
Take it from me
We got plenty to do;
Finest of packets is bad at the best,
Never no sleep, never no rest.

Never no rest,
Never no sleep!
Still, we ain't got
Any protest to peep;
All we are good fer
Is pushin' a truck;
We got the jobs
An' I guess we're in luck;
So here's to the packet, the packet be—blessed!
Never no sleep, never no rest.

*A packet is a boat that stops at nearly every port for miscellaneous freight.

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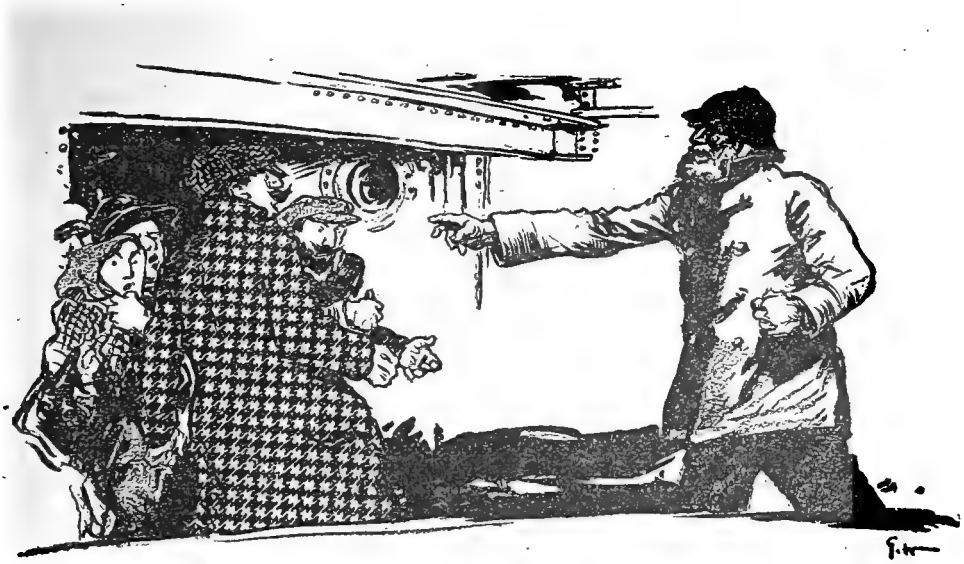

BLAZIN' BILL, BOSS

By FREDERICK ARTHUR DOMINY

ABE RYDER crouched in the lee of a sheltering dune and rubbed his smarting eyes free from the tiny particles of sand that the fierce southeaster was blowing before it in blinding, choking clouds. Squatting behind his insufficient shelter, with his head drawn down between his shoulders, he alternately gulped in great breaths of the frost-laden air and endeavored to free his eyes from the irritating atoms.

He had been to the limits of his patrol and was returning to the low-lying life-saving station hidden behind the beach hills somewhere off to the eastward, but the loose, shifting sand and the furious gale made progress slow and difficult and he welcomed the opportunity to relax his tired muscles and regain his breath.

From his cover Abe could see the line of white, phosphorescent foam that marked the outer bar, as the seas broke upon it and then, with almost unimpeded force, gathered themselves for a swift dash across the shoaling bottom, to crash with a thunderous roar and a mighty shower of spray high up on the beach. He shook his head dubiously and muttered a half-prayer that he and his mates would have no work to do in that maelstrom of seething waters.

Then, as he watched, a light shone red against the blackness of the night. So suddenly had it appeared that for the moment he doubted its reality. But it was no delusion. Shining bright and clear against the dark horizon it showed like a wandering star that was dancing frantically through space. Now high above the waters, then just visible through the mists of the outer bar, it flickered about erratically, and Abe, with his understanding of ocean sights and signals, growled softly to himself and anathematized the skipper who worked his vessel along a lee coast in the face of the storm that was raging.

"Coastin' Long Island in a sou'easter, the blasted lubber! Ol' Doc Abrams—an' for knowin' nothin' 'bout the weather I'd back him 'gainst any man livin', white or black—could 'a' told that this blow had been workin' up for the last twenty-four hours, an' there this rattle-brained son of a gun, 'stead of keepin' off-shore 's he should, darned if he ain't workin' 'long the coast 'th less 'n six fathom of water under his keel! How sech men gets master's 'stifi-

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cates beats me. I'll bet six months' wages, rations an' all, he ain't got no lead-line goin'. There! I knowed it. I knowed it, by——!"

And cursing the unfortunate Captain of the vessel heartily, he fumbled through his pockets, brought out a brass tube holding a Coston signal and, hastily adjusting it in the holder that hung over his shoulder, struck the plunger. A warning light flared up that illuminated the vicinity for a hundred yards about with its red, garish glare.

Almost before the light of the surfman's warning signal had faded, a hoarse whistle blew and then a rocket shot high above the sea, proof sufficient that the vessel had grounded and that her navigators were now anxiously calling for the assistance that would not have been required had their calculations been more exact and their approach to a lee shore more cautious.

"Two mile to the station agin' this gale 'th boots to lug an' the sea runnin' 'most to the beach hills!" Abe was saying savagely as he fitted another light and flashed it in answer to the ship's signals. "Two mile to make in man-killin' time, an' all cause some fool in brass buttons tried to cut corners in a storm that'd blow a liner four mile long outen her course!"

Stumbling over driftwood, staggering across the open stretches of beach, where the sand was loose and deep and the wind almost lifted him from his feet, plowing through gullies flooded with water, but fighting for every minute of time, struggling to notify his captain and mates that lives were in danger, without the loss of a possible second, Abe Ryder doggedly faced the storm, the obstructions in his path, and wet, breathless and utterly exhausted, at length half fell through the mess-room door.

THEN it was the station watch who called the Keeper, and he, hardly waiting to hear the surfman's broken words, "Wreck—steamer 'shore—two mile west," sent a stentorian yell up the stairway to the crew's quarters that brought them tumbling down into the mess-room, half-clothed and half-awakened, but all aware that there was work to be done, and that without delay.

Over in a corner Ryder was lying back in a chair, his head hanging upon one shoulder and his legs sprawled out before him in the lifeless fashion of one too spent to hold himself in any position, and the Keeper was eagerly questioning him in regard to the particulars of the wreck.

"Steamer, you say, Abe, an' close under the beach?

"What! run ashore head on?" He roared the words with a vigor that made the windows rattle in their casings, so astonished was he at such lack of seamanship. "By the blazin' side-lights of the ol' *Great Eastern*, why in the blazin' fires of —— does the comp'nies put men in charge of boats that don't know a blazin' lead-line from their mother's apron-strings. By the blazin'—Boys, run out the beach-cart!" Keeper Bennett cut short his ejaculations upon the lack of wisdom of the officials of the steamship companies. "An' by the blazin' blue peter, we'll land 'em on the beach if the blazin', bloomin', blasted fools knows a whip-line from a hawser.

"Hustle 'th that cart. Yep. No. 7 shot-line 'll do. Move, I tell yer, move! Bob Turner, never mind them oil-skins. You'll be warm 'nough, time you get to the wreck, an' a little water won't hurt you anyhow. Blazin' headlights, you're slow, boys! Show a little life. Ready now, all han's? Come on then. All together!"

And as, out of the confusion of commands, sarcasm and objurgations came order, with each man at his place upon the hand-lines, Keeper Bennett put his shoulder against the cart and with a mighty shove, a united pull, and a cry of "Keep her movin'!" the heavy beach apparatus rolled out of the boat-room door, down the runway, and along the sandy road that led to the surf.

"Ol' Blazin' Bill's tuned up to-night, now, ain't he?" some one asked, secure in the knowledge that from his position at the rear of the cart the Keeper could not hear the words, and addressing the man who tugged at the line beside him. "Say—he brags 'bout never swearin'. I'd a durn sight ruther have a man cuss me good an' proper than to have him yell some of his fancy stuff in my ear, sech as, 'By the blazin' bush of Aaron' or some other blazin' thing. It kinder gets on a feller's nerves. I like a little variety in swearin', myself."

"'Tis so," the other answered; "but yer'll get used to him in time. I've been No. 2 under him goin' on ten year now——"

"Blazin' searchlights! Ain't yer *ever* goin' to pull outen this gully?"

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The roar of the Keeper's voice sounded high above the storm, and the No. 2 man chuckled to himself as he threw every atom of his strength upon the line and scrambled up the sandy slope just behind No. 1, who was pulling viciously and swearing at the seas that had cut the depression across the beach.

If Keeper Bennett—Blazin' Bill Bennett he was called the whole length of the storm-swept coast on account of the peculiarity of his ejaculations—had not been the man he was he would have failed miserably in securing obedience from those men who constituted his crew. In years gone by, when the Keeper of a neighboring station shipped a new surfman who proved opposed to the discipline demanded by the regulations of the Service, there would be a shifting about, a change made here and there, until that man would find himself transferred to the High Point Life-Saving Station and under the command of "Blazin' Bill."

What happened then was not noted in the station journal, but sometimes the Superintendent of the district and Keeper Bennett might have been found in earnest conversation in the former's office and, from the laughing comments of the Superintendent and the grins of the Keeper, there might have been gleaned the fact that the Keeper was, unofficially, of course, narrating certain of his experiences with men unamenable to coaxing measures but who now, if the scars upon his knuckles, which were also exhibited to the Superintendent unofficially, could be taken as evidence, were perfectly willing to abide by the regulation rulings.

And so he had gathered his crew. Surfmen, and good surfmen all, they swore by Keeper Bill and to him yielded unquestioned obedience. From big Ed Howland, No. 1, who from his six feet three overtopped his superior by a scant inch, to No. 7, the Winter man, Spike Farley, whose former history was dimmed in a haze of mystery that even his application papers did not clear, they all recognized their Keeper's authority and had long since learned the foolishness of questioning his orders. First, Keeper Bennett demanded obedience, then proficiency in their drills and work.

"Gimme a man," he would declare, "who'll jump when I tell him to jump, an' not stop an' ask why, an' I'll make a surfman outen him."

And he had been so busily occupied in teaching some man how to "jump," only eventually to have that man transferred to another station, that at last he had openly rebelled at what had become an almost invariable custom and had asserted firmly that in the future the other Keepers would have to break in their own unruly men.

"You see, Sup'entendent," he explained with a whimsical grin, "I'm gettin' old an' the skin on my knuckles is growin' tender. So I'll take it as a favor if the next hard case that happens to get by the Commission is sent somewhere else an' you let me keep the crew I've got."

Which request was granted, in view of services performed, and now the crew of the High Point Station was composed of seasoned veterans who, headed by the indomitable "Blazin' Bill," had more rescue work to their credit than any other station in the entire district.

II

TO PULL a heavy beach-apparatus cart over two miles of beach, through ankle-deep sand, across gullies whose sloping sides give insecure foothold and at times seem almost impossible to climb, is not the play of a child. Loaded with Lyle gun, breeches-buoy, four or five hundred yards of heavy two-inch manila hawser, shot-line and sand-anchor, it would make a fair load for a good pair of horses, and when, in addition, the men pulling on the hand-lines are encumbered with the hip-boots and heavy clothing necessary to protect them in freezing water and bitter air, it means a fight for every yard gained, and a quitter is not long in the Service.

"Pull, ye sogers, pull! Walk away with it, boys! Ed, keep that line taut; whatcher think you're 'long for—jest comp'ny? Now men, all together! Up she goes!"

Like a skilful driver, Keeper Bennett encouraged one, flicked another with the whip of sarcastic comment, and, as the occasion required, bent a powerful shoulder to the wheel himself. They were entering upon the last half of the hard pull with muscles aching from their efforts and breath coming a trifle rapidly, but warmed to their work and anxious for a sight of the wreck.

Then, above the roar of the surf and the whistle of the wind, their ears caught another sound. Faintly at first, then louder

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and more distinct, a hoarse whistle sounded; once, twice, three times, and then again was the distress signal repeated.

Now there was small need of Keeper Bennett's objurgations. Like one man they quickened their pace. Faster they walked and faster, and gradually, as the cart gained momentum, they broke into a shambling trot, until over the levels, down the gullies, and up the other side, the apparatus rolled and tumbled, and the men's breath came in quick, jerky puffs and they swore half audible oaths at the obstructions in their path, but never slackened the pace that was bringing them rapidly abreast of the wreck. From behind, the Keeper watched them as he kept a steadying hand upon the tail-board of the lurching cart, and smiled complacently as he thought of the hours he had spent in training the crew that now any Keeper on the coast would be proud to command.

SUDDENLY a glare of light illuminated the beach and surf just ahead. On the ship a pillar of flame shot up into the air and a heavy black smoke swept off to leeward from the blazing oil and tar barrels that were burning on her forward deck as a signal of distress. As the High Point crew entered this lighted circle, their speed slackened expectantly. Keeper Bennett gaged the distance between ship and shore with an experienced eye and, when he judged that the proper position had been reached, gave the command, "Halt!" Immediately the cart was stopped and with the precision of automatons each man sprang into his accustomed place and, hardly awaiting their superior's further orders, made ready all the paraphernalia necessary for use in first shooting a line over the wreck and then landing her passengers.

First, a roaring fire was built from the driftwood that lay in windrows above the high-water mark upon the beach, then the whip-lines and hawser were got in readiness, the breeches-buoy and the long wooden crotch laid upon the sand in their proper place, the shot-line taken from the faking-box, and the Lyle gun loaded and made ready to aim and fire.

Standing a yard or so in the rear of the little cannon Keeper Bennett sighted it with the skill of long experience, and the surfmen who had the gun in charge changed the position of its muzzle and either elevated or lowered it as the signal was given.

"Stiddy. Stiddy, Howland! Jest a bit to the right. This wind's a'mighty strong an' we've gotter figger on it. There! As she is. An' if that don't carry forred of her after funnel my reckonin's away off."

A quick, sharp pull at the firing lanyard, a loud explosion as the plunger strikes the priming cap and almost simultaneously ignites the powder charge in the breech of the gun, a cloud of smoke, and Keeper and crew instinctively step aside, the better to watch for a signal from the ship telling them that the shot-line has fallen across it.

But no whistle blew, no light was waved, and the seconds passed until, at a sign from the Keeper, the line was rapidly hauled ashore and prepared for another attempt.

"Didn't reach, that's plain enough," Keeper Bennett grumbled, half to himself, and then asked sharply: "What charge did ye have in the gun, Ed? Five ounces, eh? Well, the regerlations say never to use more'n six, so we'll try six this time, an' then, if that ain't enough, by the blazin' hilltops, I'll put in a charge that'll carry the shot there or blow the breech-block outen the blazin' gun!"

Over the ship the seas were breaking constantly, and those on the beach could hear, or at least thought they could hear, faint shouts, as if for help, from the excited and terror-stricken passengers. Possibly it was their imagination, for all could realize what was happening on the vessel, and knew that in that chaos of pounding waves and thrashing rigging the bravest would despair and confusion and disorder reign supreme.

So they worked as only men could work who knew how to save fractions of a second in their preparations, and it seemed as if the smoke cloud from the first discharge of the gun had hardly drifted out of sight before there was another and louder report, another white volume of smoke dissolving in the darkness to leeward, and another shot sailing far out over the sea, dragging behind it its tail of slender rope.

AGAIN they awaited the signal that would indicate success, but none was given. Instead they could see, gathered about the blazing barrels, a group whose excited actions told them that their second shot had also fallen short of its mark.

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and suddenly the fire was darkened to flare up in greater fury as more inflammable matter was heaped upon the iron grating. Now it was plainly evident to the life-savers that those on the vessel were endeavoring so to illuminate it that there would be no possibility of their missing the target with another trial, and as they hauled in the wet shot-line, refaking it carefully about the wooden spindles of the faking-board, Keeper Bennett swore strange oaths and vowed, "by the blazin' fires in the devil's pit" that he would shoot that same line over the ship if it took every grain of powder upon the beach-cart to do it.

"This time I'll load that gun myself!" he declared abruptly, pushing aside the surfman who was standing, cartridge-bag in hand, ready to ram it into the gun when another had finished swabbing its fouled barrel. "Gimme that ca'tridge, Howland, an' get another outer the cart."

He pounded the little red bag of powder solidly into the gun, and then — the men gasping in astonishment — he tore another into halves with a single wrench of his great hands and savagely hammered one of those portions down upon the first charge.

"She'll bust, sure's shootin'!" some one exclaimed, alarmed at this unprecedented action.

"Bust, ye blazin' ijut?" Keeper Bill answered angrily. "Bust, eh? Well, let her bust! Uncle Sam's got money 'nough to buy another one, an' she can bust her blazin' barrel inter a million pieces if first she'll shoot a line over that wreck. Stan' back, all han's, an' stop your ears. There'll be noise a plenty when I pull this lan'ard an' we'll have a chance to see what the ol' gun's made of."

Anxiously expectant, the men awaited the result from the firing of the double charge. Gathered in a nervous group well to the rear of the gun they all voiced warnings to their Keeper and implored him to lengthen the firing lanyard with an extra coil of line, but he silenced these protests with a short command, and then, not even deigning to step back to the full length of the braided rope, he fired the gun.

For a moment the roar from the explosion of the heavy load deadened all other sounds. The beach shook with the concussion and the men looked at each other as though astonished that none showed evidence of being injured. The little brass cannon had indeed given proof of its strength, for, although it had plowed a deep furrow in the sand as it recoiled, it still remained intact and in readiness for further use. Swiftly the shot-line sped far out over the sea and fathom after fathom was taken from the rapidly diminishing coil until it seemed as if the shot would not lose its velocity until it had exhausted the entire length of the all-important rope.

But finally, and then not until there were but a few scant yards of the line left lying on the sand, the slender cord dropped into the surf and the men knew that the shot had reached the limits of its flight.

Then a lantern waved a signal from the vessel and as the life-savers hastened to make fast the heavier whip to the shot-line they could feel a constant pull that told of eager hands waiting to haul it aboard the wreck.

First the shot-line, then the whip, and lastly the heavy hawser, were drawn through the surf, and when the latter reached the ship nimble-footed sailors carried it aloft and made it fast. Again the lantern was waved and now the life-savers set up their tackle fast to a sand-anchor buried deep in the beach, and the hawser was gradually lifted out of the water until it stretched, taut as a bow-string, from shore to vessel, bridging over the intervening space and opening a road to safety where none had shown before.

Then the cumbersome breeches-buoy swayed along the hawser, and the sheaves rattled in the blocks that carried it as the men hauled upon the line that sent the buoy traveling rapidly toward the ship, and finally there came the command, "'Vast haulin'!" A moment's wait, an impatient jerk upon the line, and then followed sharply the order: "Man weather whip! Haul ashore!" and once more the buoy traversed the hawser, now carrying its first passenger from the ship.

Back and forth, with the regularity of a pendulum, the buoy swung between ship and shore. First the women and children were landed, wet, shrieking and half hysterical as the life-savers lifted them from the canvas bag, but swiftly recovering from their terror as they felt the beach beneath their feet. Then they gathered around the fire in silent groups, realizing that, although they were safe, there were others still on

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board the ill-fated vessel to be recovered.

How many times the buoy was pulled out over the breakers and then hauled ashore again, heavy with its frightened burden, the life-savers did not know. Across the space between the whip-lines they tramped monotonously, in obedience to their Keeper's orders, repeated time and again. "Man lee whip! Haul off!" "Man weather whip! Haul ashore!" But they did know that the wet line was tearing the skin on their water-soaked hands, that the continuous strain of hauling the buoy along the swaying hawser was making even their brawny backs ache, and that it appeared as if the ship would never be emptied of its human freight.

Then—and at first they welcomed it—there came a delay. The buoy had been hauled off to the ship and they were standing ready, awaiting the signal for its return, but it was not given, and the seconds passed slowly as they stood inactive. Willing as they were to cease their constant hauling upon the wet lines, they knew that there were yet many on board the wreck.

AND as the men grew impatient, so did Keeper Bennett. None knew better than he where the blame would rest should lives be lost after once the buoy had been in successful operation. He knew just how a board of inquiry would listen to his excuses and ask why all had not been landed when it was clearly proven that there had been sufficient time to do it before the wreck had broken up. His appointment as Keeper had been given for a supposed ability to do, not to stand idle and then offer explanations.

So his anger grew as he awaited some sign or signal from the vessel, until finally, when he could endure the inactivity no longer, he roared an order to the men, and so unexpected, so unprecedented, was it, that they stared at him in amazement and hesitated before obeying.

"Haul ashore!" he again shouted, when his crew had made no move to obey the first command. "Yes, I know what I'm doin' an' why I'm doin' it. You take the orders an' I'll do the thinkin' for the crowd—an' the talkin' too!" he added, when one or two of the crew seemed about to expostulate at so unheard-of an act as that which he contemplated—hauling the breeches-buoy ashore empty, when there were lives on the wreck yet to be saved.

But he stood looking grimly at them, and they knew the uselessness of protesting further by either act or word. Hand over hand they hauled in on the whip-line and the buoy approached them, empty for the first time on its shoreward trip. At last it swung idly against the stout crotch that held the hawser a good ten feet above the sand, and then the life-savers were again astonished, for clumsily, with the grace of a bear, but with all that animal's agility, Keeper Bennett clambered up until he could reach the buoy and finally succeeded in seating himself securely in it.

"Haul off!"

Mechanically the men obeyed and almost before they realized it their superior was lost from sight in the darkness. Then a sudden jerk told them that the buoy had again reached the wreck and the swaying of the hawser indicated that its occupant was leaving it.

And those on the vessel, officers, seamen and the remaining passengers, were also fully aware that there was some one in the buoy.

"Below there!" a voice shouted, and they could hear it clearly above the roar of the storm. "On deck, ye lubbers! Look alive! By the blazin' comet's tail, whatcher think this is—a picnic? Stan' from under, I'm comin' down."

The ratlines shook under the weight of some one rapidly descending, the voice continued to berate them, and they were wondering who this could be who had the hardiness to undertake the journey from safety to immediate peril, when Keeper Bennett swung himself down upon the wet deck and glared savagely about him.

"Where's the Cap'n?" he demanded explosively. "Who's bossin' this bunch of ijuts? How much time ye think ye've got 'fore this craft breaks up? Whatcher waitin'—oh, you're the Cap'n, eh?" he interrupted himself to ask a blue-uniformed individual, with a worried face, who had stepped forward a pace or two and endeavored to make some reply to the volley of questions. "So you're the big boss of this show? Well, what's the trouble? Why didn't ye keep 'em comin' ashore? How many more's aboard?—Won't get in the buoy? What!"

Overcoming his astonishment at the sudden appearance of this fierce-faced, rough-voiced giant, the one whom Keeper Bill had

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addressed as Captain had managed to stammer an explanatory word or two, and then the Keeper stood silent for a moment and allowed him to make clear the reason for the delay.

"An' so that's the trouble!" he finally roared, when he had heard the commander's story. "By the blazin' peak of ol' Vesuvius, they won't make the trip in the buoy, eh? Where's the boss of them dirty, garlic-eatin' fools? Show him to me an' le's see what he'll do when *I* talk to him!"

III

DOWN in the steerage a motley crowd of panic-stricken Italians were talking excitedly, each alive to the dangers of the situation, but each in still more deadly terror of making that journey through the blackness, away off into the unknown over white-crested rollers that waited to engulf them, and with nothing between them and certain death but a slight hawser that led off to none of them knew where. They stood in a frenzied group, imploring their saints to protect them, praying to the great *Dio*, whose anger they must have incurred, to calm the waves and lessen the winds. And in their center was one, towering head and shoulders above them, who was evidently their leading spirit and who was conducting them in their wildly shouted prayers and urging them to stand firmly together and not trust to the entreaties or orders of the vile-mouthed dogs that officered and manned the vessel.

Some there were among them who were not strangers to America and who were now returning to the land of plenty, and these translated the orders of the sailors to those who had no knowledge of the English language, and also voiced the refusals to leave their quarters and entrust themselves to that swaying rope and clumsy canvas bag.

"No! No! We weel no leava de sheep!" they shouted, time after time. "*Nome di Cristo!* You keel us een de mada water-r-r! No, we staya her-r-e. De rope eet ees too leetle. Eet breaks. We die."

That was what Keeper Bill heard when he approached the quarters of the steerage passengers, guided by the Captain and followed by the sailors; that, and a babel of other words meaningless to him, and for a moment he stopped and looked down upon the wildly excited group in their close, narrow quarters.

Then he singled out their leader and, heedless of the commander's protestations, unconcerned by the threatening faces of the foreigners, he shoved his way through the motley crowd, throwing aside with powerful sweeps of his arms those who blocked his path, like a strong swimmer breasting a heavy sea, until he stood, face to face, with the man he sought.

"So you're boss here?" he shouted, and then lowered his voice, for the clamor had suddenly ceased and the Italians were watching curiously this man who, careless of their knives or stilettos, had forced a passage through them. "So you're bossin' this bunch?" he continued. "Well, boss 'em, for all I care, but jest 'member one thing—*I'm* bossin' *you!*"

No doubt the man failed to understand all his words, but "boss,"—any one who had worked in a trench knew the meaning of that,—so he half smiled when he replied:

"*Si.* Me boss these men. You boss, where?"

"Here! I'm boss *here*, *now*, an' till you land on the beach! *Me!*" Keeper Bill said grimly. Then he laid the weight of his hand on the Italian's shoulder and commanded, "Tell 'em to go on deck!"

"No! no! Dey weel no go. I tella dem nota to go. Eet ees no safe!"

"Tell 'em to go on deck!" the Keeper repeated sternly, motioning, that there might be no misunderstanding of his words, toward the ladder that led from the steerage to the upper deck.

But the man shook his head stubbornly. "No! I weel not. Dey staya her-r-e! I staya her-r-e!"

His refusal was absolute and he shook the hand from his shoulder and stepped back a pace, as if the better to emphasize the fact that he would obey no orders that would further endanger the lives of his followers or himself.

"What! Ye won't?" Blazin' Bill's temper rose with the rapidity of mercury exposed to a hot Summer's sun.

"You'll stay here, eh? You leather-colored son of a garlic-eater! By the blazin', blindin' Northern Lights, you tell me you'll stay here when I orders you on deck! What?"

He roared the words with a vehemence that startled his listeners, and then, while

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they were still wondering just what manner of man this was who had pushed himself into their midst, and before their leader could frame another broken refusal, he acted.

Like a flash, as quick as the thought prompting it, the hand that a moment before the Italian had shaken easily from his shoulder shot forward and tightened with the grip of a vise about the swarthy throat until the strong, muscular fingers were embedded almost their own thickness into the flesh. Shaking the man like a bulldog worrying his prey and threatening the rapidly purpling countenance with his free hand, Keeper Bill growled fiercely, menacingly, and with an expression in his eyes that boded ill for the man who refused him:

"Now will ye go on deck, blast yer blazin' eyes? Now who's boss? What? Stick me 'th a knife, ye blazin' Dago! Stick me, will ye?"

From a deep-throated growl, his voice rose until it resembled the roar of an angry lion, the hand raised above the Italian's head dropped downward and, following a brief struggle, came a sharp crack, the knife that had glistened for an instant fell clattering to the deck, and the hand which had held it hung useless, with the wrist broken, against its owner's side.

AND then, at the sight of their compatriot groaning with pain and writhing helplessly in the grasp of the burly devil who had boarded their vessel and boldly invaded their own particular quarters intent upon enforcing his outrageous commands, a howl of wrath arose from the excited Italians. Weapons flashed menacingly in the air and those in the rear shoved forward until the life-saver and his captive were hemmed about by a tightly packed crowd of infuriated men, each awaiting an opportunity to bury a knife between those broad shoulders covered with the salt-encrusted blue uniform.

From the safety of the upper deck the Captain and crew of the ship viewed the spectacle. Cowed by the sight of swarthy faces wrinkling in anger and black eyes gleaming diabolically, and cautiously remembering that they were outnumbered by this throng of maddened foreigners, none lifted a hand to assist the lone man.

But Keeper Bennett was aware of the folly of expecting assistance from the sailors or their commander and, despite the peril of his position, his lips curled in a scornful smile as he glimpsed the white faces peering down on him from above. If *his* crew were up there then he would have laughed at the danger. Right joyfully would they have swarmed down the ladder to their superior's aid, he knew, and he almost laughed aloud as he thought of the astonishment of the Italians, and their precipitate flight, if he were now leading that seven, who welcomed fight as they did their meals, across the crowded deck. Instead, however, he was alone, the path to safety blocked by angered men, and each movement impeded by the weight and struggles of his captive.

Some men would have freed the prisoner, but that was not the way of Blazin' Bill. If he won the main deck, then the Italian would be with him. If not, well—more than one would know that an American could fight until he was down and out and unable to lift either hand or foot.

Inch by inch he gained in his progress toward the ladder, hitting, with his one free hand, blows that landed upon the faces of his assailants with the force of a sledge—blows that sent them sprawling, half unconscious, into the arms of their friends behind, until those same friends, terrified by the strength of the man who faced them, would fall back and let their comrades drop helpless to the deck. Hitting, kicking, fighting savagely, like a tiger about to be robbed of his prey, swearing strange oaths, and always half-dragging the fast choking Italian behind him, Keeper Bill gradually gained the ladder.

In a dozen places his coat showed cuts from the keen knives threatening him every moment, a gash upon his forehead let the blood stream down in ghastly redness across his face, but in the number of his adversaries lay his safety. His back was protected by the body of his captive and before him the men were so packed together that each impeded the others' movements. He could strike at any face, but they, willing as they were to injure him, could find but little opportunity without endangering a friend.

Now he had reached the foot of the ladder, and like a pack of half-starved wolves surrounding a giant stag, the Italians stopped their onslaught, waiting until that dreaded arm of his was being used to lift

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his body up the rungs; then—and in anticipation they howled their joy—they would throw themselves upon him and drag him down; then they would stab and trample him beneath their feet; and then, when they were finished with their prey, what other man would have the temerity to enter their quarters and command them to do as he should order?

But Blazin' Bill had not fought his way across the crowded deck to lose the chance of safety when it was almost within his grasp. Above the howls from the steerage and the excited comments from the crew his voice roared a command, and when the sailors answered him he did a thing so unthought of, so marvelous in its strength, that, in spite of their blood-lust, even his enemies uttered a half-cheer of appreciation. Lifting his captive, he swung him back and forth, once, twice, three times, and then, with a final effort, he threw him high above his head, high into the air, and as the body of their leader rose above the railing of the main deck, the Italians gasped in astonishment, and a moment later in dismay, for the sailors had grasped him and hauled him over the rail, and as they did, another joined them—the man who had defied them and had escaped while they stood inactive, admiring the strength of his two good arms.

Then he leaned over and, looking down upon the mass of upturned faces, he spit his words out scornfully:

"Now who's boss, ye blazin', bloody Dagos? Now who ye goin' to mind? I'll tell ye. *Me!* I'm the big boss, an' don't ye forgit it! *I'm* the one who'll tell ye what to do, an', by the blazin', roarin' guns of Bunker Hill, *I'm* the one who'll see that ye do it! Ye muts! Ye knifers! Ye putty men! Ye thought that I was scared of ye, didn't ye? Am I? Answer me! Didn't I fight ye? Didn't I lick ye? Men! Blazin' rockets, th' crew of High Point c'd eat a dozen of ye for dinner an' then be hungry. I wish—" But suddenly, cutting short the flow of angry words, he turned to the sailors who stood behind him, and ordered, "Run a tackle an' h'ist that man up to th' buoy. Put him in it an' send him ashore, an' then stan' by an' we'll see if th' rest of that bunch won't foller him."

And they did, for Keeper Bill kept his post at the head of the ladder and as the empty buoy came off from the shore, he would single out a man from the crowd beneath him, pointing, that there might be no misunderstanding of his choice, at the one he had selected to make the journey, and that one, dreading the result of a refusal, fearing the wrath of the man who had shown what he could do if aroused, would sullenly climb the ladder and allow himself to be hoisted unresistingly aloft and lifted into the buoy.

GATHERED together the following morning upon the long wharf leading out into the bay, where they were awaiting the steamer to carry them across to the mainland, the passengers and sailors from the wrecked vessel united in a mighty cheer of appreciation for the services rendered them by Keeper Bennett and his crew. Even the Italians had forgotten their hostility and helped to swell the noise with shrill yells of gratitude.

"De beeg man he ees one devil!" they declared. "One devil an den one angel! First he beat us, an' kick us, an' breaka Pietro's ar-r-m. An' we, beeg fool, we trya to keel heem. Den we do as he saya. We maka de long swing 'cross de water-r-r, we come to de lan', we safe. Den he geeve us de grub, he fixa de ar-r-m, an' now he senda us to N'y Yok. *Madre di Dio! Si.* He, who dey call Blaza Beel, he ees one man! He ees de beeg boss!"

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THE TRUST BUILDER

By JOHN A. HEFFERNAN

MR. PERCIVAL SAUNDERS remarked that business was a beastly bore anyhow and he never bothered his head about it, don't you know, but he was quite sure, nevertheless, that the frantic competition of modern commerce and the cruel complexities of modern civilization made life far more—should he say "strenuous"? yes, he should say "strenuous"—far more strenuous than it had been in the last generation.

Mr. Harold Armitage quite agreed with him: modern commercial warfare was unceasing and unmerciful; it tore the heart and brain out of a man, and it was ruinous to his spiritual nature; before the flush of youth was gone the rough grind of the sordid struggle abased every high ideal, bore down every lofty purpose, dulled every fine instinct. Mr. Thomas Armitage looked across the table at his son and his son's friend. With a sniff he stiffened his bellicose side-whiskers, rumpled his aggressive brows, thrust forward his pugnacious shoulders and said, quite explosively:

"Bunk!"

"Ah!" breathed Harold.

"Eh!" murmured Mr. Percival Saunders.

"Bunk!" Mr. Thomas Armitage repeated. "Twiddle! Twaddle! Tommyrot!"

He leaned back, thrust his thumbs into the armpits of his waistcoat and glared at the two young men with whom he was dining. Harold grinned and Mr. Saunders looked slightly apprehensive. The pudgy, square-topped index finger of the head of the great breakfast-food house of Armitage & Barnes shot toward the latter suddenly.

"You, Percy!" cried the old gentleman. "What do you know about struggle and competition? Eh? Your dad piled up his million and passed on and you've never had a thing on God's earth to do but blow yourself. 'Strenuous?' Bunk!"

"But, father——"

The shifted index finger cut off Harold's protest.

"And what do you know about it? Eh?" his father demanded. "Ever have to struggle in your life? Eh? Twaddle! Ever have your heart jerked out? Eh? Twiddle! Ever have your fine instincts warped by need of grub? Eh? Tommyrot!"

Mr. Armitage sat back again and reinserted his thumbs in his waistcoat armpits.

"Now, for the last generation," he said. "That's me, I suppose. Well, my boys, the gentle recreation I had to indulge in if I wanted to keep on eating—and I did, you bet your life!—was to hike over a God-forsaken stretch of up-hill and down-dale country with Pete Barnes and Bill Curley, sticking picks into pretty hard ground, blasting holes in impolite rocks, ducking snakes and a grizzly with a grouch once in a while, washing dirt from the beds of chilly

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streams after breaking the ice to get at the dirt, hot-footing it over bumpy deserts, thirsting and shivering and sweating and hoping the good God Almighty would drag us through somehow. It may have been less strenuous than a taxi ride to the opera, Percy, but it was no downy-couch existence either, you bet your life!"

"Aw—er, I suppose not," Mr. Saunders admitted. "By the way, Mr. Armitage," he asked, "after you had—aw—found your beastly mine, you know, you and Mr. Barnes kept up your—aw—partnership, but—aw—what became of Mr. Curley?"

The healthy color in Mr. Thomas Armitage's cheeks deepened a trifle and he pursed his lips.

"Bill Curley," he said at last, "was one of the loyalest, levelest, straightest, squarest, up-and-down fellows that ever stood by in tough weather, *but* in business he was the pepperiest, most cantankerous and bull-headed idiot that ever made an all-fired nuisance of himself."

Mr. Saunders looked distressed, but Harold leaned forward eagerly.

"Dad," he said, "don't you think it time that you and Mr. Curley ended that old quarrel? With your two plants you could control——"

"Stop!" Mr. Thomas Armitage banged his fist down on the white table-cloth and set all the glass and silver garniture jigging. The pink spread from his cheeks to his nose.

"My business," he declared leaning forward and glaring at his son, "was built up by me and Pete Barnes despite Bill Curley. He started in our line when he let his pig-headed obstinacy cut him out of our combination and he kept us on the hustle at every deal. I've got him now—got him going fast, and he can't come around at this late day and try to butt in. If his —— old 'Corn Candies,' can lick 'Frazzled Friskies' on the market, all right; I'm not the man to squeal because he beats me. But he hasn't beaten me, and he won't, you bet your life!"

THE choleric old gentleman stood up and buttoned his coat over his spherical front. With a savage bite on the cigar that was between his teeth, he turned and walked out of the restaurant. His son drummed on the table with his finger-tips and Mr. Saunders lighted a new cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Aw—well," said Mr. Saunders at last, "as a aw—peace-maker, old fellow, you're not such a ripping, beastly, blazing success. Eh?"

"No," Harold admitted. "I never seem to get right on anything with the old gentleman. Maybe it's because we're too much alike in some respects. But just the same, it's time we stopped fighting each other in the breakfast-food game. There are only two big interests in it, Curley's and ours, and there ought to be consolidation. Father always looks at these things from the standpoint of his youth. Big business is done differently now; coöperation and not competition is the order of the day."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mr. Saunders indifferently. "But I am a little aw—interested, don't you know, as to how you're going to get the governor to aw—agree with you. What is the aw—cause of his aw—antipathy—that's the word I want, antipathy—to Mr. Curley?"

"I don't know just what it was; it happened before I was born. All three of them started in this business together, Curley, Barnes and dad, but Curley and dad had a row over their first advertisement. You know old Curley; red-headed, fat, goes off like a bunch of fire-crackers by spontaneous combustion."

"Pleasant task aw—getting them together, I should say," Mr. Saunders observed.

Harold grinned. "I'm going to put it up to Jake Buchmuller," he said.

"What's this new job for our Jake?" a smooth and pleasant voice behind young Armitage inquired, and Harold, turning his head, looked up into the smiling eyes of Mr. L. B. Vanderleming. The distinguished member of the New York bar who for years had been his father's counsel had come up behind him, and there was quite a glow of interest in the fine-featured face with the cascade of iron-gray hair falling over the high brow.

"A combination in restraint of trade," Harold said, smiling back at the lawyer. "Sit down and I'll tell you about it."

Mr. Vanderleming took a seat, but shook his head when Mr. Saunders suggested "a little something."

"No, thank you," he said. "I just want to hear about my old friend Jake, and then I must be running along."

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"It's less about Jake than about the business," Harold said. "I want to consolidate Armitage & Barnes and the Curley Cereals Company."

"And you want to get Jake to hitch Mr. Curley and your father in team harness?" said Mr. Vanderleming. "I have a great deal of confidence in Jake's persuasive powers, but——"

"Well, I am going to try it, anyhow," Harold declared as the men stood up. "I'm going right down to the office now to see Jake. Come along, Percy?"

"No, I aw—think not," Mr. Saunders responded as he drew on his gloves. "I think I shall take a drive in the park, you know."

MR. JACOB G. BUCHMULLER, advertising manager for Armitage & Barnes, looked with a kindly eye on the serious if not entirely sober person who sat in front of his desk.

"So one of our wagons bumped you, bo," he said. "Too bad! Too bad!"

"De too-bad t'ing is soothin' dope," responded the visitor, "but it don't pay no doctors' bills, and it don't buy no new clo'es."

"You want us to come across with the real money, eh?" said Jake. "How badly were you jarred?"

"I ain't seen no doctor yet, but I t'ink somepin' must be busted in me insides. De driver wasn't lookin' or he wouldn't a-hit me, an' I got witnesses to dat. I got ye, an' I got ye right on de law t'ing, young feller, an' ye'd better come across proper an' git out of it while it's cheap."

Mr. Buchmuller seemed alarmed.

"In view of the seriousness of the case," he said, "I feel justified in making you a settlement offer of two hundred—cents. All you have to do is to sign a release and get two bucks. Look good, eh?"

"Two bucks!" The bruise his soul had received was evident in the indignant and reproachful tone. "Two bucks nothin'!" he exclaimed in utter disgust. "Ye can't hand me nothin' like dat, young feller. I got to have me lawyer call on ye."

Jake nodded cheerfully.

"Who is your lawyer?" he asked.

"L. B. Vanderleming," boasted the visitor. "You can't put nothin' over on him, I guess."

Jake looked duly impressed.

"Have Mr. Vanderleming call, by all means," he said. "Maybe we can fix the thing up without going to court after all."

The victim of the accident didn't waste time. He was back in the office in five minutes and with him was a fuzzy-faced fellow with red-rimmed eyes whose fringy trousers and shiny coat-sleeves seemed to indicate that men of real legal genius were quite careless in the matter of attire.

"Say," said this person to Jake, "I'm Counselor Vanderleming, and dis gent is me client. He got badly hurted by one of your delivery wagons w'at run over him w'en it wasn't no fault of his, see! All we want is a fair shake, but we want a fair shake all right, all right."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Vanderleming," Jake said genially. "I get you all right on this proposition, and, *believe* me, I don't want to put anything over, except the level stuff. Now, I offered this gentleman a two-spot in settlement of his claim, but he couldn't see it. We're sorry for his hurt feelings, and willing to pay for his pants. I may add that in these cases we invariably allow a counsel fee of half a simoleon."

The red-rimmed eyes of the fuzzy-faced person glittered.

"Sign de paper!" he cried, turning on his client. "W'at do ye t'ink ye kin pull down—a house an' lot? Sign de paper!"

JAKE had had a form of liability release prepared while the injured man was hunting up his counsel, and it was soon signed and witnessed. Counsel and client marched out of the office, the counsel gleefully flipping his fee and the client rather moodily stuffing a two-dollar bill into his pocket.

A chuckle came from the door leading to Harold Armitage's private office, and the young son of the head of the house advanced into the room.

"You have a great legal mind, Jake," he said, as he sat down in the chair lately occupied by the pretended Mr. Vanderleming.

"It would have cost us half a hundred if I sent it down to Vanderleming's office," Jake grinned. "We might as well save forty-seven fifty and settle it here. I saw the fellow get hit, and even if he wasn't hurt, he might have faked up a case."

"Good work!" Harold commented. "But say, Jake, I have a real job for you. I want you to get dad and old man Curley together."

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Mr. Buchmuller stared at him.

"You want me to get the governor and old man Curley together?" he said slowly. "In armor? And with boxing mitts?"

"I'm dead serious. We want to have the two concerns united, and you can get dad to agree."

"Nellie, get the moon for baby," cried Jake. "Say kiddo, if you want a little excitement, why the Gridiron Athletic Club has a thing on in the Garden to-night, between Oyster-Face Horrigan, the hope of the white race, and Three-A-M Johnson, the dink destroyer, which might be more scientific and would sure be less brutal. Better buy a pass-in, Harold, and avoid the effusion of blood all over the furniture."

"Quit the joking, Jake. I know it will be a hard job, but I want you to try."

"I refusal!" declared Jake positively. "I repeatal I refusal!"

"Wait a minute," Harold said, reaching for a sheet of paper and pulling a lead-pencil from his pocket.

Jake looked down on the paper upon which the young man was rapidly figuring.

"There," Harold said at last, indicating with his pencil point, "there is our gross outlay for the year, there is our receipts total, there is our margin of net profit which is—he jabbed down a few more figures—"there is the net profit percentage. If Curley comes in with us we can cut this" —indicating the expense total—"in half, and double" —indicating the profit percentage —"this. Here is the plan of combination" —" he jabbed some more figures on the sheet of paper and handed it to Jake. Buchmuller read it carefully.

"There's something you forgot to put down," he said, raising his eyes.

"What is that?" Harold asked

"X, equaling Curley's red mansard, and all the other letters of the alphabet representing the governor's bump belligerent. Oi-yoi! It can not be didded, Harold; not by plain arithmetic, algebra or trigonometry, and calculus always gives me a kink in the knob. Forget it, and duck trouble!"

"Quitter!" Harold reproached him. "Now Jake, look here! If you lie down on me I'll have to pull this thing off by myself, but it's going to be pulled off."

"Say, 'You bet your life!'" said Jake, looking at him shrewdly.

"Oh, I'm not like father," Harold said with a grin.

"No; you haven't any side-whiskers," Jake admitted, "but in some respects there's a sort of family resemblance. I suppose, if you've set your poor little heart on this iniquitous trust scheme, I'll have to stay in the pot with you. But, break it gently to father, Harold, because——"

"But that's *your* end. I mildly suggested something this noon and he——"

"Good *night!*" groaned Jake. "Why not leave this frail, not to say delicate, work to muh, Harold? You have a way of breaking eggs with a sledge-hammer that's forcible but messy. Leave it to a light and graceful toucher, my boy."

"Leave it to you?" laughed Harold. "Why, I'm pushing it at you!"

Jake's enthusiasm went down a few points and he became thoughtful.

"What hit in between pop and the Curley gink in the first place?" he asked. "No mush-thing, eh? Nothing like a lady-finger in the pie?"

"No," Harold said, shaking his head, "I am sure it wasn't anything like that, but I'm not sure just what it was. Edie's dad said something once about it being a row over the first big advertisement."

Jake's face brightened.

"Does Barnes know?" he asked.

"Sure, he must know," Harold answered. "They were all three together when it happened, and Pete must remember."

"Then," cried Jake briskly, "move number one is to see Brother Barnes. I hit the pike in an hour, sweet child, and I'll be buzzing old Peter in A-B Junction at breakfast time. Keep up a good heart, little man, and you'll go to jail for being rich yet."

A-B JUNCTION, Ohio, was the Armitage & Barnes village whose directory was the Armitage & Barnes payroll, and whose public buildings were the Armitage & Barnes breakfast-food factories. Peter Barnes, Tom Armitage's sunny-faced partner, dwelt in a big, rambling cottage on its outskirts. Toward this cottage in the early morning hours walked a young man with a dress-suit case, a young man whose garments and demeanor no less than his shrewd eyes and sharp features betokened the native New Yorker. On the porch of the cottage he deposited his suit-case and pushed the bell-button with an insistent finger. The door was flung open and a deep roar came out of the hallway.

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"Well, Jake! Put it thar! Hey, girl! here's Jake Buchmuller, and I'll bet he's hungrier'n a grizzly after a blizzard. Come right in, boy! Gimme that bag and your hat and coat! Come—we're just at breakfast. You're looking like a hundred-dollar bill, kid, fit as a rollicking two-year-old. Set down—thar! Girl, some grub for the boy——"

"For the love of Mike!" gasped the breathless Jake who had been forcibly despoiled of hat and coat and bag, dragged through the hall and into the dining-room and thrust down into a big leather-backed chair at the table over which the rosy, happy face of Mrs. Peter Barnes beamed like the sun on a Summer morning.

"Yes, give the boy a chance to breathe, Pete," Mrs. Barnes protested. "You'd talk the ears off him. A-a-a-n—neee! Some sausages and buckwheats for this gentleman. How is Celia? Does she like living in an apartment? Yes, Annie, that's right. I think myself, steam heat must be enervating. And for me, I just couldn't live in those little bits of rooms way up in the air in a sky-scraper—that's what you call 'em, isn't it? A-a-n—neee! Some more coffee. And some more sausages. Now you *must* eat 'em. Is Edie well? And Harold? And——"

Jake smiled and bobbed his head, and bobbed his head and smiled until the first violence of the interrogatory storm had subsided, and then as he raised a nut-brown cake on his fork and looked at the golden sirup that dripped from it, he exclaimed:

"Little old New York has everything else on the map against the ropes and groggy—except for hospitality and buckwheat cakes. There's nothing at home like this, Mother Barnes."

The breakfast was over at last, and Jake and Pete Barnes made themselves comfortable with cigars in the library.

"What you doing West?" asked Mr. Barnes, after Jake had lighted his cigar.

"Hist! Hush! Conspirating," Jake answered. "Harold and I have decided to put something over on the old man—if you have no kick."

Barnes chuckled.

"Going to pull one off on Tom, eh?" he said. "Got to get up early, kid. Tom has the big head on him; always had."

Jake took out his pad and pencil and began to illustrate. He hadn't got far when Mr. Barnes swept aside his pencil.

"Hold on thar, Jake!" he cried. "One time when we were in New York, stopping with Edie, she packed us into her big automobile and hiked us down to hear the opera —*in Dago*. It was immense, only I couldn't understand it. That paper business you've got thar makes me think of it. Those million-dollar high notes you're hittin' sound perfectly grand, but I don't know the language."

Jake looked crestfallen.

"Oh, don't let it make you feel bad," Mr. Barnes consoled him. "If you can get Tom to stand for it, I'll trail all right. Only you'll have one merry —— of a time, I reckon, getting Tom and Bill hitched up together after all these years."

"Well," said Jake, "that's one of the reasons I bubbled in on you this beautiful A.M. What busted friendship's holy grip, anyhow? What was the bale of hay that made the camel a hunchback?"

Pete Barnes threw back his head and his loud "Ha-ha!" resounded through the house.

"Wait!" he gasped between gusts of laughter. "Wait, till I tell you!"

There being nothing else to do, Jake waited until Mr. Barnes regained control of himself and plunged into his tale. And as Jake listened his eyes widened, and so did his grin, and at last he joined the story-teller in a wildly hilarious explosion that brought Mrs. Barnes in from the dining-room with some alarm in her eyes.

"It's all right, girl," her husband reassured her. "I was just telling Jake how Tom and Bill fell out—he never heard the yarn. Well, Jake, thar stood Tom at one end of the table and thar stood Bill at the other. Tom's eyes was a-snappin' and Bill's red mop—he had it all over his head in those days—was all rumpled and bristlin'.

"'You can't run me!' says Bill, shakin' his fist at Tom.

"'You can't run me, you bet your life!' says Tom, shaking his fist at Bill.

"And then, both together, like they was sayin' 'Amen' at a pra'er-meetin', they yells out, 'Go to ——!'"

"And then?" inquired Jake.

"And then," replied Mr. Barnes, "Bill Curley marched out of the office and the next thing we heard he had bought a plant in Indiana, and was fightin' us tooth and nail. Sometimes he's had us on the hip

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and sometimes we've had him one shoulder touchin', but it looks to me like we'd both win. And I'm glad, because Bill was a good fellow."

MR. JACOB G. BUCHMULLER boarded the New York Express the following morning with a slight smile flickering over his acute physiognomy and his air of jaunty self-confidence a little more pronounced. With a twist of his wrist he flung open the door of the smoker's compartment and then stood still with his eyes very wide open.

A stout gentleman sat by the window. His color scheme was a pink, deepening in spots into a geranium red. Three pink chins overlapped his collar, two pink cheeks bulged out under his round blue eyes, and a bulbous nasal organ glowed rosily between them, while a smooth pink forehead curved gracefully and in unbroken sweep into a polished pink poll at the back of which a semi-circular row of fiery bristles stood like a red picket fence. Instantly Jacob recognized the redoubtable head of the Curley Cereals Company.

"Good morning!" he saluted, sitting down.

Mr. Curley drew from his breast pocket a flat leather case from which he extracted a pair of moon-like spectacles framed in tortoise-shell. Adjusting these on his nose he surveyed his smiling vis-à-vis.

"Ah! Mr. Buchmuller!" he said. "How are you? And how is old Tom Thick-nut, the old scoundrel?"

"Nicely," Jake answered. "Business good?"

Mr. Curley looked at him suspiciously.

"Whoopin'," he said. "How is it with you folks?"

"Gallopin'," Jake cried with enthusiasm. "Can't handle it; been out looking over some property for a new factory site."

"Um!" grunted Mr. Curley. "Better put a storehouse on it for your immovable stock. I'm going to hand you something in a short time that'll make the old man sit up some."

"Oi-yoi!" Jake exclaimed. "There you go again. If you and my boss aren't twin brothers temperamentally, there never were any. You're going after Armitage's hide and he's going after your hair. What do you two think you're doing, anyhow—marketing breakfast-food or scalp-hunting? Don't you sometimes think it's a shame the way you and the governor burn up the ducats to pay the fiddler for your war-jig—ten performances a day? Why don't the two of you get together, like the good pals you used to be, instead of tossing money out the window to a grouch that's old enough to be given the Osler dope?"

"Poof!" grunted Mr. Curley. "Look here, young man. Out in the big country where there's a lot of digging and fighting to be done, I'd never ask for a better partner than Tom Armitage. But in business I'd rather be cooped up with a sore-nosed wild cat. He's the most mulish, obstinate ——"

"Yes, yes," Jake said soothingly. "It's all right—I know all the adjectives by heart. But believe me, Armitage has it on you just a little for the broad-mind thing. He admits that you have a good deal of business sense."

"How? What's that?" Mr. Curley had opened his mouth and eyes in genuine surprise.

"Why sure," Jake declared. "Didn't he tell me once that he made a mistake, he thought, when he turned down some dope of yours about an ad. long ago?"

A look of anxiety came into Mr. Curley's round blue eyes.

"Say," he said, "there's nothing the matter with Tom, is there? Nothing wrong here?" He tapped his smooth pink brow.

"Not a thing," said Jake.

"And his liver—his liver's all right?"

"Sound as a dollar."

"Glad to hear that," Mr. Curley declared emphatically. Then, in a musing tone, he added, "So he thinks he might have been wrong about that ad.! Tom Armitage thinks he might have been wrong! Well! Well!" And he relapsed into a pensive silence from which Jake didn't think it wise to rouse him.

WHEN Jake arrived at New York he found that Harold Armitage had something to distract his attention, temporarily at least, from the planned combination in the breakfast-food trade. Buchmuller received at the office a request that he repair as soon as possible to the apartment in which Edith and Harold Armitage had gone to live at the end of their honeymoon. Harold, grinning idiotically, met him at the door.

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"Hush!" he whispered. "Follow me!"

On tiptoes he led Jake along the corridor to one of the bedrooms, at whose door he tapped. A young woman in a pale blue waist and skirt, with a white apron and a white cap, opened the door.

"May we come in?" asked Harold.

She nodded her head.

Harold turned around and beckoned to Jake, who marched behind him into Edith's dainty boudoir. A little pale, but as beautiful as ever, Pete Barnes's daughter lay in her bed, one white hand resting outside the counterpane. Jake hesitated at the threshold, but she called to him feebly yet gaily:

"Come in, Jake, we have something to show you."

Harold was already tiptoeing across the room to a pink-satin basket swinging beside the bed. He raised a corner of the pink-satin cover and, turning, beckoned to Jake. Jake bent over.

"What is it?" he asked.

Harold uncovered a little roly-poly wrinkled countenance from which came a thin but emphatic protest.

"A kid!" exclaimed Jake.

"Sure," Harold declared proudly. "*My* kid!"

"Oi-yoi!" said Jake. "Isn't he a peach!"

"*She* is," said Edith, leaning up on her elbow.

"Ah! A suffragette!" said Jake. "Well, I wish you joy, both of you. Let me look at it again."

Harold once more raised the corner of the coverlet and Jake inspected the new member of the Armitage household.

"What does the governor think about it?" he asked.

"He doesn't know about it," Edith said. "You see, he's taken a trip South—left day before yesterday, and baby didn't come until yesterday. Harold wired father and mother last night."

"They must have gotten the telegram after I left them," said Jake. "By the way, Harold," he cried, his face alight with a sudden thought, "this is just what we needed!"

"Er—what?" said Harold.

"There," Jake cried, dramatically pointing to the pink basket, "lies the trust-builder of the breakfast-food trade! *Believe* me, we'll get the old man and Curley together now!"

WHEN Tom Armitage emerged from the Jersey "tube" on his way home he found Jake Buchmuller waiting for him, and Jake, after relieving him of his bag and getting him into the subway, remarked quite casually that his old friend Mr. Curley was inquiring for his health.

"Did you tell the old hickory stick that I'm not dead yet, even if I am a grandpop?" asked Mr. Armitage.

"Sure I did, and he was glad to hear it," said Jake. "He talked like he might have been worrying about your health lately and—do you know I think he's kind of lonely?"

"Lonely? What about?" Mr. Armitage turned sharply on his advertising man.

"Oh, I don't know," remarked Jake innocently, "his mind seemed to be running back to old times; said something about some old advertising proposition that he seemed to think he might have been wrong on."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Armitage. "Nothing the matter with him, eh? Didn't talk like he was softening at the top?"

"Oh, nothing like that; just the melancholy-muse thing, I think."

"Didn't kick about his liver any? Look yellow, eh?"

"No; pink."

"Hum!" murmured Mr. Armitage, more to himself than to Jake. He thought he might have been wrong? Bill Curley thought he might have been wrong? Well! Well!"

And they were getting out of the train before Jake said:

"We may meet him down at Harold's. He was so anxious to see Tom Armitage's grandchild, as he put it, that Edie sent him word to come round."

"And, by gosh, I'll be glad to see him!" said Tom Armitage. "Outside his business ideas, Bill Curley was always a good old sport, you bet your life!"

But when they came face to face in Edith's parlor the two old warriors didn't by any means rush into each other's arms. Mr. Curley made a roll of his upper lip and said, "Hello, Tom!" and Mr. Armitage's side-whiskers stiffened as he answered, "Hello, Bill!" Edith looked apprehensively at her husband and her husband looked inquiringly at Jake, who merely lowered and

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lifted his left eyelid twice. A few minutes later, however, he whispered to Harold:

"Wait till they see the kid!"

The nurse brought the baby in at last, and Tom Armitage inserted his finger in one of the crumpled pink fists while Bill Curley rather bashfully inserted his finger into the other crumpled pink fist.

"He's a fine little fellow, you bet your life!" declared Mr. Armitage, looking at Mr. Curley belligerently.

"*She* is! *She* is!" corrected Mr. Curley, grinning in triumph. He had remembered.

"I mean *she* is," said Mr. Armitage shortly.

"We were hoping she would be a he," Edie said. "We wanted to call him Thomas, after you, dadsie."

"We could call her Thomasita," Harold suggested hopefully.

"Meeaow!" commented Jake, and Edith glared at both of them.

"I always had a liking for the name of Myrtle, now," remarked Mr. Pete Barnes, who had come on from Ohio to see his daughter's baby.

"Yep," agreed Jake, "Myrtle sounds kind of good. So does Heliotrope. And Immortelle—there's a name for you, sweet and dignified and classy. You might string 'em all together, now; Myrtle Heliotrope Immortelle Armitage—some form, eh, what?"

"Jake," said Edith severely, "if you get fresh about my baby, you and I are heading for trouble."

"I've lost muh voice!" cried Jake in alarm. "Settle it between yourselves."

For some time Mr. William Curley had been rubbing his rosy nose as if it needed polishing, which it didn't. After several preliminary coughs he said at last:

"If I may say so, Mrs. Armitage, I knew a lady once whose name was Jean and she was as fine a girl as ever lived. She was Harold's ma, and——"

The old gentleman ceased to speak and resumed the polishing of his nose. Edith's eyes brightened as she turned them toward her father-in-law. He had whisked a pocket handkerchief from his coat-tail and was explosively blowing his nose.

"I was kind of hoping," said Mr. Thomas Armitage, in a voice that was slightly husky, "that some one might remember—Bill, you —— old scoundrel, put it there!"

His hand shot out and Mr. Curley's closed on it. With a wild "Hurroo!" that wakened the baby and drew an indignant "Hush!" from his daughter, Peter Barnes jumped up and threw his arms over the shoulders of his two old partners.

"Harold," ordered that proud young father's father, "lead us to the sideboard. We must break a bottle on this."

And as Jake poured the sparkling wine into the glasses in the dining-room, Tom Armitage said:

"What was it you wanted to put on that first big ad. Bill?"

Mr. William Curley rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I—I'm jiggered if I can remember, Tom," he confessed at last.

At which the mirth of Pete Barnes doubled him up, and they had to slap him on the broad back several times before he could regain his breath.

"So—so—you both of you gone and forgot about it!" he yelled. "Tell 'em what it was, Jake. Tell 'em."

"I believe," said Jake, looking out the window, "that Mr. Curley wanted to put a picture of a fat baby in the middle of the text and——"

"And Tom thought it was too dod-gasted undignified," concluded Mr. Pete Barnes.

"Hum!" grunted Mr. Thomas Armitage. "I think, after all, you were right, Bill. We should have paid more attention to the infant trade. And we will, you bet your life. Jake, have a picture made of that little rascal just as she looked when she grinned up at Bill and me in there, and—what shall we call it?"

"The Frazzled-Friskies-Face," suggested Jake.

"What do you think of that, Bill?" Mr. Armitage demanded, turning deferentially to Mr. Curley.

"Very good! Very good, indeed," agreed Mr. Curley. "And now, all glasses full? Well, here's to the old times! Drink!"

"And here's to the baby!" cried Tom Armitage when the glasses had been filled again.

"And here," said Mr. Peter Barnes, with a wink at Jake, "here's to the new times —to Armitage, Barnes & Curley!"

For an instant Tom Armitage and Bill Curley looked at each other, then each lifted his brimming glass and as Barnes yelled, "Drink!" the champagne gurgled down their throats.

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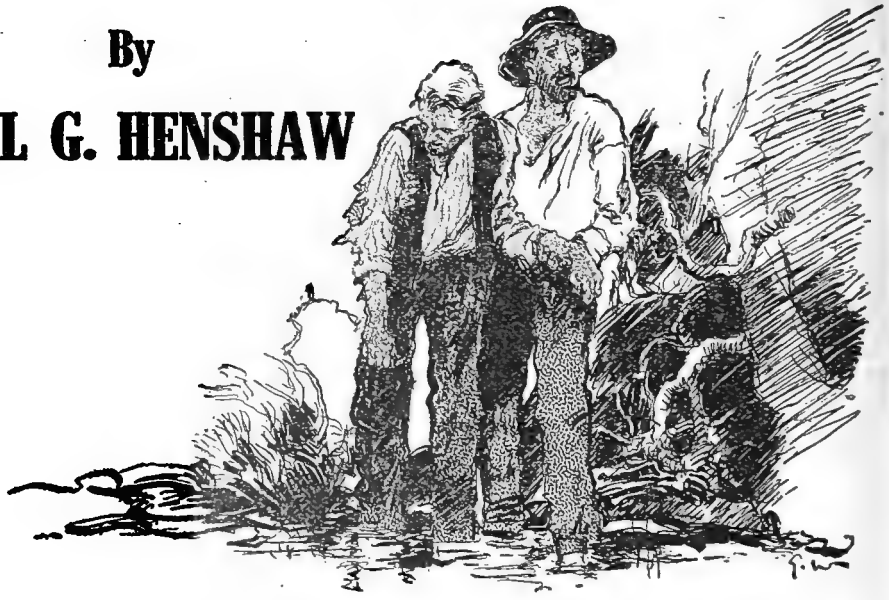
THE SHERIFF'S STORY

By

NEVIL G. HENSHAW



PAUL HEBERT, sheriff of Mouton, and one of the best known of his craft in all southwestern Louisiana, puffed for a thoughtful moment or two upon his brown-paper cigarette before replying to my question.

"Yes, m'sieu," said he finally, "I have many occurrences in my life, some of them exciting enough, but few of them are what you could really call stories. They are just the ordinary events of crime, pursuit, and capture, common to one of my profession, and they differ little save in their minor details.

"There is, however, an incident in service of my predecessor which might prove of interest to you, and, if you are willing, I will relate it in place of one of my own.

"Damprez, the sheriff before me, was an officer justly noted for his tireless pursuit of criminals. He was a large man, very quick and strong, with an eye that seldom missed its aim, and an absolute fearlessness for any sort of danger. In his hours of leisure he was of a bright, jovial disposition, always ready for a joke, a glass of wine, or a hand at stud poker, a game of which he was passionately fond. If you will add that he was as generous as he was brave and that he always paid his debts, you will have as good a description of the man as I can give you.

"Damprez had served eight years as sheriff and was about to approach the time of his customary reëlection, when the crime occurred that has to do with my story. It was a particularly terrible one, combining as it did both murder and highway robbery. Briefly, it came about as follows.

"One Saturday morning shortly after daybreak, Walker, overseer of Sugarland plantation, set out for this city to draw the money for the week's pay-roll. He rode upon horseback and, as the distance was not more than ten miles, he was expected back no later than eleven o'clock, one hour before paying-off time. As the month was November and Sugarland was in the midst of the grinding season, the pay-roll was proportionately large, amounting to something over two thousand dollars.

"Upon arriving at the bank here, Walker cashed his check and received his money, which was paid out to him in small bills,

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together with one hundred dollars in silver. The entire amount was then placed in one of the bank's canvas bags, the silver at the bottom, the bills on top, sealed in a large envelope.

"Having tied the sack to the pommel of his saddle, Walker immediately departed upon the return journey. Four miles from the city he was seen and spoken to by a chance acquaintance. After this he disappeared, together with the money, as completely as though the earth had swallowed him.

"Now, m'sieu, you can imagine what followed. When at twelve o'clock Walker had failed to appear, M'sieu Oubre, owner of Sugarland, was worried. When a little later it was reported to him that the overseer's horse had been found at the pasture gate, he became terrified. In five minutes more he was in the saddle, galloping madly toward the city.

"Damprez, whom he was fortunate enough to find in his office, wasted little time. 'Act before the other man is able to carry out his plans' was his motto, and, in less time than it takes to tell, he had mounted his horse, had sworn in a posse, and was upon his way to the probable scene of the crime.

"A careful search of the road yielded nothing until he had journeyed some five miles from the city. Here, at a spot where the highway passed through a dense strip of woodland, his eye was caught by a glitter upon the roadside. Dismounting, Damprez found that this glitter came from a heap of silver, scattered carelessly, as though thrown from a height. Upon being counted, the silver was found to approximate one hundred dollars—the amount drawn that morning by Walker.

"After this, although a diligent search was made in the woodland for some distance upon both sides of the road, nothing further rewarded the efforts of the posse. There were no signs of a struggle, no marks of violence, no traces of the body of the unfortunate overseer.

"Yet there was no doubt in the minds of the searchers. Murder had been committed, followed by highway robbery. There could be no other explanation—not even the usual one of hatred and revenge. Walker had been a stranger from the North, had worked at Sugarland but a year, and, in that time, had made nothing but friends. It was impossible to think of his having had an enemy and, in addition, there was the absence of the two thousand dollars.

"Yes, it was a plain case of murder and robbery, and it only remained to catch the highwayman.

"ALL THAT afternoon the sheriff and his posse scoured the countryside. They searched the fields, the forests, the outbuildings of the smaller plantations: they even rode to the edge of the far distant sea-marsh. At dusk, as they were returning home empty handed, they met a stranger upon the road, and paused to question him.

"The stranger replied that he was a hunter, as they could see from the gun upon his shoulder. On the morrow he was to set forth upon an expedition, for the provisions of which he had that day been to the city. Outside of a short detour, made into a field for the purpose of shooting some partridges, he had been upon the road ever since leaving Mouton. The sheriff must have passed him while he was in the field.

"Satisfied by this account of himself, Damprez was about to let the hunter go, when one of the posse asked him if his partridges were for sale. Replying that they were, and naming his price, the hunter reached into his game-bag for the birds. As he drew them out a white object came with them and dropped upon the road. Damprez, noticing this, picked up the object and examined it.

"It was a canvas bag with the name of the Mouton bank upon it, and it was spotted with blood.

"In less than a second Damprez had the hunter covered with his revolver and was asking him in a slow, stern voice to explain his ownership of the bag.

"To his surprise the hunter showed not the slightest sign of guilt or fear.

"The matter was easily explained, he said. He had found the bag that morning upon the roadside and, thinking that it would be just the thing in which to carry his shot, he had taken it along with him.

"The spot where he had found it? It was where the road ran through the woods, about five miles from the city. The blood upon the bag came from the partridges, as one could see by the feathers that were stuck to it.

"No, he had not seen any silver. If he

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had, you may be sure that they would have found that upon him also.

"Thus spoke the hunter, and so straight was his story that, even after he had snapped the handcuffs upon his wrists, Damprez frowned with doubt. The charge was explained to the prisoner as they marched him in, but even this did not disturb him greatly.

"He was sorry that the overseer had been killed, he said, but it was no affair of his. All he asked was that they would let him go in time to start upon his expedition.

"That night there was great excitement in Mouton, and most excited of all was M'sieu Oubre. Quick and violent of nature as are most of my people, filled with horror at the death of his overseer and with anger at the loss of his week's pay-roll, the words of the plantation owner so inflamed the citizens that it needed but a word from him to convert them into a dangerous mob.

"This, however, M'sieu Oubre had no intention of doing. He was for the law, he said, but the law must be swift. There must be no pause, no hesitation in the punishment of this criminal. It was not a question of Sugarland or of his overseer; it was a question of all the plantations and of all the overseers in the parish. Let justice lag, and no man would be safe in drawing his pay-roll.

"Thus spoke M'sieu Oubre, and, as can be imagined, the authorities were not slow in carrying out his wishes. As owner of the largest of our plantations his words were not without weight, and there was the ever present possibility that the citizens might take the matter into their own hands.

"Accordingly the wheels of justice were set in motion with a swiftness that would have suited the most fastidious. The following day—Sunday though it was—a special grand jury was empaneled. In less than half an hour they had brought in a true bill against the hunter and had set his trial for the following day.

"As for the trial, it was little more than a form. Witnesses were called and testified to the drawing of the money, the departure of Walker, the finding of the silver, and to the positive identity of the bag. It was all very hurried, but very sure.

"For the defense there were no witnesses at all, since the hunter had been entirely alone from the time of his leaving the city to the moment of his arrest. True, they put him upon the stand that he might speak for himself, but it was evident that he had recognized from the first the hopelessness of his position.

"'What is the use in my saying anything when you are all so positive of my guilt?' said he. 'I am innocent of the murder of this man whom I have never seen, as you will find some day.'

"So the trial went on, swift and sure, to its expected end. Perhaps you will understand its shortness when I tell you that the jury went out at a little after three that afternoon. They were back in less than half an hour with a verdict of guilty, recommending, however, that, as the evidence was purely circumstantial, the sentence be commuted to imprisonment for life.

"It was found out afterward that this was due to a soft-hearted juror whose opinion his companions had been unable to change. Otherwise they would have hanged the prisoner without leaving their seats.

"So the hunter was sentenced to life imprisonment, and Damprez was ordered to take him to the prison at Baton Rouge. They left the following morning, upon the Morgan City steamboat, the sheriff frowning perplexedly, as though still in doubt; the prisoner white and silent, gazing sadly at the free, open country about him, which he was to see that day for the last time.

"OF THE journey that followed, the sheriff's description is perhaps the best. According to him the morning was spent upon the upper deck, where he sat with his prisoner, watching the bends and shallows of the Bayou Teche. The hunter was handcuffed for safety, but, upon the sounding of the dinner-gong, Damprez substituted a pair of leg shackles for the handcuffs, that his charge might have the greater freedom in eating his meal. After dinner both the handcuffs and the place upon the upper deck were resumed.

"At dark the boat was just entering the impenetrable—and at that time uncut—tract of cypress swamp which lies between here and Morgan City. The night fell warm and close, and very black.

"At the sounding of the supper-gong Damprez once more replaced the leg shackles, taking care, however, not to remove the handcuffs until the hunter was firmly secured. Then, taking his prisoner by the arm, he led the way into the dining-saloon.

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"The dining-saloon was upon the upper deck, separated from the rail by a narrow alley-way. Entering from this alley-way, Damprez found the Captain and passengers already seated at table beneath the hanging lamp. With a word to them, the sheriff prepared to seat himself.

"At this moment the hunter acted. Swinging his chair, which he had just drawn out from the table, he dashed it into the lamp, and sprang to the door. Shackled though he was, he made it at a bound, and fell sprawling upon the deck.

"Damprez, as usual, moved with the swiftness of lightning. With the crash of the lamp he had drawn his revolver and turned, but, in the first blinding rush of darkness, he did not notice the prisoner's fallen chair. Striking it fairly with both ankles, he pitched forward heavily upon his face. He was up in an instant, his revolver still in his hand, but in that instant the prisoner had accomplished his purpose and had rolled from the deck to the waters of the bayou below.

"Springing to the rail, Damprez picked out a dark object astern and emptied his revolver into it. Then the boat was stopped, a skiff was lowered, and a careful search was made of the bayou and its banks by means of lanterns.

"'He is dead, and at the bottom of the bayou,' said the Captain when, after having given up the search as useless, they returned to the boat.

"'I am not so sure of that,' replied Damprez. 'These hunters are good swimmers, and one can never be certain of one's aim in the dark. Nevertheless, I have him either way. If he is not dead he is in the swamp where, sooner or later, I will find him.

"'As you know, he will be forced to come out upon this southern edge here, as going north he will find nothing but sea-marsh, more desolate even than the swamp itself. To stay in the swamp indefinitely is something impossible for even an armed and unshackled man. All that I have to do is to collect a posse and patrol this southern edge until my prisoner comes out. If he fails to do so in a reasonable time, I will know that he has died inside.'

"Now this, m'sieu, was a most wise and reasonable plan, but there was one thing of which the sheriff knew nothing. The expedition upon which the hunter had failed to start had been planned for the northern edge of this very swamp where, on account of its desolation, his companions had hoped to find fresh fields for their hunting and fishing. Having sailed around by the coast, they should have arrived at their destination the day before—the first spot in the sea-marsh that they all agreed upon.

"IT WAS with this knowledge, therefore, that the hunter had arranged his escape, carefully saving his food while in jail, and so, when he rolled from the deck to the bayou, it was not in a mad dash for safety as the sheriff thought, but in pursuance of a carefully considered plan.

"Striking the water with a heavy splash, the hunter let himself sink straight down to the bottom, where he stayed until he felt sure that the wheel of the boat had passed over him. Then, turning upon his back, he floated gently upward until the tip of his nose was above water.

"Here he held himself by paddling with his hands while the sheriff shot at a passing log, and the roustabouts lowered the skiff. At the approach of the skiff he dived once more and came up beneath it, clasping the keel with his hands and knees, his head beneath the overhang of the stern, with only the nose above water.

"By lying perfectly still it was not difficult for him to hold this position during the sheriff's search and, when the skiff finally turned back, to float into the shadow of the trees with the first part of his plan accomplished.

"Ah, but the second part—that was the question! To roll shackled from the upper deck of a moving boat under the fire of a vigilant sheriff, that was as nothing to what now confronted the hunter.

"Consider his position, m'sieu. There he was upon the southern edge of that cypress swamp facing a journey which, even with every possible advantage, no man before had had the courage to attempt. Of the time that it would require him to make it the hunter had not the slightest idea. It might take two days or two weeks and, even were he to reach the sea-marsh, he might spend a like time in finding the spot which his companions had agreed upon. In addition he was without guide or compass, wholly unarmed, with his legs shackled, and with but a handful of food, a part of which had been ruined by his stay in the water.

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"Yet the hunter did not hesitate. Better to die in the open, as he had lived, than behind the bars at Baton Rouge.

"Waiting until the boat had once more resumed its journey, he struck out toward the north, guiding himself by the bayou's edge. In less than five minutes, however, he was forced to abandon the attempt. Shackled as he was, and going at a half stride through the absolute darkness of the swamp, there was no chance to escape the thousands of cypress knees that strewed the way before him. In a dozen steps he fell half as many times, striking himself against the knees and the closely growing cypress trunks, and so, seeing the uselessness of his efforts, he sat himself down to consider this new difficulty which would allow him to travel only in the daytime.

"In the end he simply agreed that he would be forced to double the original time of his journey. It was a bitter disappointment, but there was no help for it since, until he reached his companions, he would be unable to rid himself of the shackles. With a stone even, he might have broken the locks, but there are no stones in a cypress swamp.

"There was, though, one gleam of comfort in the situation. If it meant double time and double provisions, it also meant double rest.

"In less than half an hour the hunter found that even this comfort was denied him. The weather was close and warm, as I have said, and, as a consequence, the swamp was alive with mosquitoes.

"Now you, m'sieu, know what a nuisance a single mosquito can be. Multiply this by a million, place yourself in absolute darkness with your legs fettered, and you may have some idea of what the hunter endured.

"What at first was uncomfortable soon became painful, and in a little while increased until it was unbearable. Half smothering himself in the folds of his coat, the hunter tried to ward off the attack, but to no avail. The mosquitoes came in swarms, in clouds, biting and stabbing him through the folds of his clothing until he was mad with the poison and pain.

"Had he had a match, he could with a handful of moss have built a smudge upon some stump, and so relieved himself. But one can not find matches in a swamp.

"So the hunter spent the night in torture, thrashing about in the water and darkness because he could not keep still, tripping and falling again and again as he fought his invisible foe.

"With the first streaks of daylight, despite his weariness, he once more set forth toward the north, getting his direction from the rising sun. This time, by careful watching, he made his way with comparative ease, although the sunken knees and the treacherous shackles were a sore trial to him.

"THAT day at noon, having made good progress, he paused upon a piece of highland and examined his food. He found it a soft and soggy mass from which in other days he would have turned in disgust, but now he gazed at it eagerly, carefully arranging how each particle of it should be used.

"There was enough for five meals, he finally decided—one meal each day. If upon the third day he saw no evidence of the end of his journey, he would divide the last two meals into four.

"Having eaten his meal for that day, the hunter arose to go. The food had been but a morsel for one in his condition and had only increased his hunger, but it must suffice. Upon the highland grew a gum tree, and reaching up for a handful of its leaves, he thrust them into his mouth, munching them as he splashed along.

"At dark the hunter stopped upon another piece of highland, chewing a second handful of the gum leaves before he threw himself down to rest. He was sick, and bruised, and utterly weary, and the shackles had torn the flesh of his ankles until each step was an agony, but he had made good time, and he was satisfied.

"Owing to his exhaustion, he managed to spend this night in a kind of stupor, despite the mosquitoes. With the first red streaks of the following dawn he was upon his feet again, limping and stumbling toward that far-distant northern edge.

"Shortly after sunrise that morning the hunter heard a splashing behind him, and turned to see what it might be. A while he gazed until he had made sure that it was a man, and then, with a sigh of disappointment, he seated himself upon a knee to await his capture.

"It was hard, after all that he had endured, but there was nothing else to do. Shackled as he was, and without even a

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club wherewith to defend himself, it was useless to think of escape.

"So the hunter sat still, his head bowed upon his hands, until the splashing had approached to within a few feet of him. Then, rising slowly to his feet, he faced about resignedly.

"'It is all right. I will go quietly,' he began, and then broke off suddenly with a gasp of relief and surprise.

"For to his words and to his presence the newcomer paid not the slightest heed. Groping, stumbling, muttering crazily beneath his breath, he splashed past the hunter as though he had been no more than one of the myriad of cypress trunks. His eyes were dull and empty, his face, through mosquito bites, was swollen almost beyond recognition, and even as he passed, his whole bent figure shook with the violence of the swamp fever.

"Reseating himself, the hunter watched him go. A thought flashed across his mind that perhaps this man might have food, but he resolutely put it from him.

"'No,' said he to himself, 'I will not rob a dying man.'

"And then, as he once more turned his face toward the north, the thought came to him— 'But even though you have not robbed him, you have not helped him!'

"Ah, m'sieu, there was a thought for the hunter. It held him like a detaining hand, halting his painful footsteps and causing him to turn to where the stranger was fast vanishing amid the never-ending lines of cypress trunks. Almost unconsciously he began to follow him, and, as he went, he fought the fight between his duty and his desire to escape.

"For that was what it amounted to. In his condition the stranger could never make the journey to the northern edge, even though there were food enough for the two and the hunter were able to take him there.

"No, there was no choice. Either the hunter must abandon this man to his fate or he must return with him until they were discovered by the searchers upon the southern edge. Of the searchers being there the hunter had no doubt. Damprez would never give up his prisoner until he was certain that he was dead.

"So the hunter made his fight, and, in the end, he turned his face toward the south. Perhaps it was madness, since he owed the man nothing and was even then escaping from the punishment for a crime of which he was innocent, but he could not go on.

"OF THE return journey there is little to tell. The stranger was like a child, going quietly in his delirium wherever the hunter led him, and so these two made their way through the poisons and dangers of the swamp, heading ever toward the south.

"That night, at a point not far from the spot where he had come ashore, the hunter perceived the light of torches, and shouted his whereabouts. Ten minutes later he stood before the sheriff's campfire, which had been built upon a little knoll near the bayou's edge.

"And now, m'sieu, comes the strange part of my story.

"Having handcuffed his prisoner and placed him under guard, the sheriff turned his attention to the stranger. He stood just where the hunter had left him, staring vacantly before him, and at sight of his face, Damprez started back in amazement.

"'*Dieu!*' he gasped. 'It is Walker—the overseer! He has been lost in the swamp!'

"'No,' replied one of the posse. 'He has been hiding there. See, here are the bills of the pay-roll which I have just found upon him!'

"'But that is impossible!' cried Damprez. 'The bills were stolen by myself!'

"Ah, that instant of excitement! It was the sheriff's ruin, for, under its influence and scarce thinking what he did, he made his confession.

"Afterward he explained the matter fully. Having lost money belonging to the parish at cards, and being unable to replace it before his term expired, he had adopted this desperate means of saving himself. It had been his intention to take the amount from his commissions after his reëlection, and return it to the owner of Sugarland, saying that the robber had agreed to give back his booty if he would cease his pursuit of him. Such agreements being of frequent occurrence, this explanation would pass unsuspected.

"The robbery had been easily accomplished. Disguised by means of a handkerchief tied about his face, the sheriff had had little trouble in holding up the overseer and taking the bill envelope from the top of the canvas bag. Afterward, fearful of discovery, he had hidden the envelope in a

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hollow tree without opening it, intending to return at dark and dispose of it at his leisure.

"'And what is in that envelope I can not imagine,' said the sheriff in conclusion. 'From the moment of my getting back to the city I have never had a chance to return to it.'

"THE mystery of the envelope was explained when, upon the way to Mouton, Damprez stopped at the hollow tree and drew forth his prize. Upon being opened, it was found to contain a bank-book and a sheaf of canceled checks. In his eagerness to steal that week's pay-roll, the sheriff had succeeded only in getting the worthless records of the pay-rolls that had gone before.

"After his recovery, and during his trial, Walker explained the matter completely. It had been his custom, he said, when balancing the bank-book, to put the checks in the place usually occupied by the bills, thus insuring the safety of his charge.

"As for his stealing the bills himself, the overseer admitted the matter freely, although he added that it was only upon being robbed that the idea had come to him. Tired of his position, anxious to return to the North, and with a real culprit for the authorities to pursue, he could not resist such a golden opportunity. Thus, leaving the silver on account of its weight, and turning loose his horse to avoid suspicion, he had made his way to the swamp. Here, knowing nothing of the dangers before him, he had easily lost himself.

"In the end he was sentenced to five years in prison, the sheriff following him with a shorter term of three.

"So there is my story, m'sieu, and I think that you will agree with me that, at least, it is a curious one."

HEBERT paused and I not only agreed with him, but assured him that his was one of the most extraordinary tales that I had ever heard. A prisoner pursued by a sheriff who thinks himself guilty of at least a part of the crime of which the prisoner has been convicted, and this same prisoner giving himself up to save the life of the man whom he is supposed to have robbed and murdered! Surely such things do not happen every day.

So I thanked Hebert and went my way, carefully refraining from inquiring the fate of the prisoner, or asking this hunter of men whether, in his former estate, he had not been a hunter of birds.

That I had known of the matter beforehand made no difference. Then, too, Hebert had distinctly stated at the start that he knew no stories of interest about himself.

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TEN THOUSAND SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

THE MOST FAMOUS BODY OF ADVENTURERS IN THE WORLD—THE FOREIGN LEGION OF FRANCE

By STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

ENGLAND has her crack fighting regiments: the 42nd Highlanders, otherwise known as "The Black Watch," and the 17th Lancers, known far and wide, since the days of Lord Cardigan's famous charge, as "The Death or Glory Boys." Germany has a pet regiment of cuirassiers; Austria-Hungary is justly proud of her 9th Hussars; Italy considers the slouch-hatted men of her *Bersaglieri* inferior to no other body of tried and proven light infantry; we of America have our Rough Riders, and our "Fighting Seventh" regiment of cavalry; and France has her world-famous brigade of polyglots, "*La Légion Étrangère.*"

It is of these last-named soldiers we will speak, for no body of fighting men of the world of yesterday or to-day can boast of a history more glorious or of honors achieved upon more widely scattered battle-fields. With the exception of South America and Australia, every continent in the world has seen the Legion in action. Morocco, Algeria, Spain, Russia, Italy, Mexico, Indo-China, Formosa, and Madagascar have each one battle-field or more whereon the *drapeau* of the Legion has been borne in triumph to a glorious victory or to an equally honorable defeat. During the Franco-Prussian War the soil of France itself was stained with the life-blood of more than a thousand of these fighting sons of all nations.

Had France a Kipling, the world would ring with the achievements of the Foreign Legion; but even as it is, the prowess and insouciance of the *Légionnaire* form an inexhaustible topic for conversation among the red-blooded sons of men who make grim war their trade. In the stifling cantonments of India, in the wet canteens of England, and in the dry canteens of America, Indian Gurkha, Cockney Lancer, and Missouri Volunteer discuss the doings of *La Légion Étrangère.*

Gurry-covered fishermen on the Banks, "New Chums" in the Australian bush, daredevil New England whalemen, and ne'er-do-well beach-combers of the Far East are wont to talk of the Foreign Legion over their evening pipes. And the reason is not far to seek, for the men of the sky-blue tunic and madder-red *kêpi* are men who fear but one thing—the universal establishment of a permanent peace.

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ORGANIZED in 1831 by the "Citizen King," Louis Philippe, during the stormy days that followed the Revolution of 1830, the Legion was originally composed of a choice assortment of Dutch and Belgian mercenaries, Russian and Polish refugees, German renegades and deserters, together with a generous sprinkling of adventurers from Italy Corsica and Sardinia. They were embarked for Algeria, and upon their arrival at Algiers proceeded to celebrate the event.

Two-thirds of the *Légionnaires* failed to put in an appearance at the first reveillé. Native purveyors of arrack and black wine had been compelled to stand treat. Harems were entered and the inmates forced to dance. Walls were scaled and fruit trees violated. All in all, the first night in Algiers was a lively one for all concerned, particularly for some French officers of one of the German battalions who were deprived of their swords and thrown into a vat of half-fermented wine after a vain attempt to stop the regimental spree.

In due time, however, Colonel Stoffel licked his charges into shape, and took the field against Abd-el-Kader and his hordes of Islamites. The immediate results were astonishing, both to the Mohammedan adversaries and to the regiments of French conscripts already in the field. The men of the Legion seemed to care not whether they lived or died. They carried everything before them without pausing to estimate the cost in human lives.

In short, within the space of a single year, *La Légion Étrangère* became famous for its deeds of reckless daring. Had Louis Philippe had a dozen regiments similar to the Foreign Legion in the field, there would have been no Fifteen-Year War with Algeria.

THE ARMY THAT LEAVES NO WIDOWS

THEN came the days when the Carlists of Spain rose against their baby Queen, the Infanta Isabella, and the Foreign Legion was sold to Queen Regent Maria Christina for a sum of approximately 700,000 francs.

The four thousand reckless soldiers of fortune hailed the change of masters with delight, for the Carlist War promised to be of a more exciting nature than the long-drawn-out struggle against the wily Abd-el-Kader. Nor were they disappointed, for in 1839, after a bitter four-year conflict with the Basque Carlists, barely a tenth of the Legion were left alive. A few of these entered the ranks of the Royal Palace Guards; and of the eighteen men who took part in the famous "Staircase Fight" of 1841, when an attempt was made to kidnap the ten-year-old Queen, eight were ex-soldiers of the Legion.

Meanwhile, in 1836, a second Foreign Legion was organized and sent to Algeria. The new Legion consisted of two regiments. Saint Arnaud, the French gambler and adventurer who lived to become a Marshal of France, joined the new Legion in Algeria as Captain; and Bazaine, who also became a Marshal, joined them in 1839 after he had risen from the ranks of the original Legion and won a Captaincy.

UNTIL the year of 1847, when Abd-el-Kader surrendered, the Foreign Legion bore the brunt of the fighting in Algeria. Pursuant to a policy which has remained in force until the present day, the men of the Legion were invariably chosen whenever a sacrifice of human life was demanded, or whenever a hopeless expedition or assault was planned.

"One hundred dead conscripts mean fifty French widows and an increased pension list; but one hundred dead men of the Legion mean but two or three French widows and no swelling of the pension budget," was the way one Marshal of France explained his reason for keeping the Legion continually in the van. In other words, what the guinea-pig is to the scientists of to-day, were the men of the Foreign Legion to France during three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

Said General de Négrier after a series of French defeats, "In other French regiments soldiers can conquer, but in the Legion they can but die."

During the Algerian insurrection which followed the surrender of Abd-el-Kader, Bazaine became a Brigadier-General. Saint Arnaud was made a General; and Canrobert, who had been in command of the Legion for several years, was given the command of a division.

In 1854 the Legion was embarked for the Crimea under the immediate command of Bazaine. Saint Arnaud was in command of the French contingent, which included a division under Canrobert. Knowing well

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the mettle of his old regiment, Saint Arnaud placed it in such a position at the battle of the Alma that Lord Raglan expressed his admiration for its fearless work. At the death of Saint Arnaud, Canrobert assumed command of the French forces and carried out the dead Marshal's policy of exploiting the Foreign Legion.

SOLDIERS WHO KNOW NOT HOW TO RUN

DURING the eleven months in the trenches before Sebastopol, the men of the Legion distinguished themselves by hundreds of acts of conspicuous gallantry. Prince Menschikof's Russians spoke of them as, "the French soldiers that know neither how to run nor to speak French."

For the second time during its existence the Foreign Legion was nearly wiped out; and after the fall of the Malakoff in 1855 the battered remnant was ordered back to Algeria. Its distinguished service in the Crimea had been rendered at a fearful cost —but very few French widows were left to mourn!

Recruited to its normal strength and refreshed by a breathing spell of two years, during which it policed a substantial portion of Algeria, the Foreign Legion was ordered to Lombardy in 1859 to take part in the fight against the Austrians. In the orchards and vineyards surrounding Magenta the Legion more than upheld its regimental traditions. General MacMahon was in command, and so well did this former dashing Captain of *La Légion Étrangère* acquit himself, that Napoleon III. gave him a Marshal's baton and created him Duke of Magenta.

After the brilliant "soldiers' battle" of Solferino, where the Legion helped in the making of Marshal Niel, came the Peace of Villafranca and another short breathing-spell. Bazaine, severely wounded, and Canrobert, had each been awarded the grand cross of the Legion of Honor, and Napoleon III was well pleased with his double regiment of aliens.

The year of 1862 saw the Foreign Legion in Mexico under Bazaine. Two thousand of them were provided with horses, and constituted a flying column of cavalry. A part of its duties consisted of scouting, and preserving a line of communication from Vera Cruz inland. At the end of the first year on American soil, fever, Mexican regulars and guerrillas had reduced this body of brave men to a bare half of its original strength.

A SECOND ALAMO

IN APRIL, 1863, a small body of dismounted *Légionnaires* reënacted the famous battle of the Alamo. Two officers and sixty men under Captain Danjou were waylaid near Camaron by a horde of Mexican guerrillas numbering several thousand. In spite of the overwhelming odds, Danjou formed his company into a hollow square, and gave battle. The Mexicans charged the little band twice, but were forced to fall back by reason of the unerring aim of the French and the bristling wall of fixed sword-bayonets with which the latter preserved their formation.

Slowly retreating before the Mexicans, Danjou and his men finally sought shelter within the adobe walls of a deserted *hacienda*. The brave commander indignantly refused to surrender, and the Mexicans received their answer in the shape of telling volleys of Minié bullets. Night fell, and the wounded commander called for two volunteers to make an attempt to steal through the Mexican lines to summon aid.

Every man in the detachment offered his services, although certain and sudden death lay in wait. An intrepid Irishman named Fitzgerald was the first chosen, as he insisted upon the practically hopeless sacrifice. Lots were drawn in order to decide who the second man should be, and a fiery tempered Sardinian won the contest. Under cover of a demonstration on the northern side of the *hacienda*, the two doomed men slipped out of the building to the southward. Had the enemy been fewer in number the attempt might have been successful, but as it was, the Mexicans were clustered around the *hacienda* so thickly that a fox could not have slipped through their ranks unchallenged.

The two men had scarcely crawled a distance of fifty yards before the Mexicans pounced upon them. The Sardinian emptied his musket and thrust right and left with his fixed bayonet with telling effect until he was borne to the ground. Fitzgerald, a man of wonderful physique and physical prowess, managed to regain the *hacienda;* but he had sustained at least a dozen fright-

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ful wounds, and breathed his last within the hour.

IN SPITE of the fact that their position was hopeless and that a surrender would have been perfectly justifiable, the wounded commander exacted a promise from his men that they would not surrender no matter what befell them.

Shortly thereafter Danjou died, and the Mexicans made a determined attack. Ammunition gave out, but without a murmur the detachment of Legioners kept their promise to the dead commander. The Mexicans finally forced their way into the adobe building, but even as they gained the threshold of the main room, the leaders paused and doffed their sombreros at the ghastly sight.

More than two score of the brave men lay upon the slippery floor of sun-baked mud—lying dead wherever they fell, in some cases one on top of another. Barely a dozen of them were left alive, and each of these was wounded and unable to stand. A few of these survived, and in due time the story of the heroic but useless struggle was borne to the French camps.

Upon a table in the Regimental Hall of Honor of the Legion rests to-day the severed, mummyfied hand of brave Danjou, a gruesome relic of the Mexican campaign of the Legion.

In 1865, the city of Oaxaca capitulated to Bazaine and his men, and Porfirio Diaz was made a prisoner. Late in that year Secretary Seward sent a note of protest to Napoleon III. The ill-starred Maximilian was left to shift for himself, and the Foreign Legion and other French troops were ordered out of the country.

Back on their old Algerian station in 1866, the fragment of the Legion were occupied for four years in dealing with the insurrection of the Bedouins under Walid-sidi-Sheikh. They avenged the massacre of the Beauprêtre column, and, stiffened by fresh drafts of alien recruits, were in a fair way of quelling the insurrection, when the Franco-Prussian War broke out. The Legion was ordered to France.

It maintained its reputation throughout the hostilities. Upon one occasion ten companies of the Legion stood off an entire division of German artillery for several hours, thereby covering a strategic movement of French troops. The German shrapnel tore great holes in the ranks, but the men of the Legion stood firm; and so accurate was their chassepot fire that the German gunners were more than decimated, and Von Moltke inquired as to the identity of the French troops who had held his artillery at bay.

Under the Third Republic the Foreign Legion was returned to Algeria in time to be in at the death of the Kabyle insurrection in 1871. Meanwhile, the fame of the Legion had spread abroad, and its ranks were swelled by all sorts and conditions of men who itched for active service. Deserters from the English garrison at Gibraltar stowed away on vessels bound up the Mediterranean, sooner or later to reach Oran or Algiers, the recruiting stations for the Legion.

Dissatisfied residents from Alsace-Lorraine, seasoned fighters from the American Civil War, Polish refugees from Russia, Fenian malcontents from England and Ireland, Irish-American adventurers, and ne'er-do-wells from almost every land under the sun flocked to the colors of the Legion. French officers from other regiments, ruined by gambling or hounded by creditors, found a refuge in their ranks, and an opportunity to redeem themselves in Algeria. No questions were asked of the prospective recruit. The only requirements were that he be young, strong, and willing to serve France for five years.

A BATTALION FIGHTS AN ARMY

THE Franco-German dispute at an end, France looked into the situation in Indo-China. 1873 found the Legion on the scene, and in November of that year the citadel at Hanoi was carried by assault. Then followed a series of military operations which kept the Legion east of Suez for twelve years, although detachments from the twin regiments were despatched to Madagascar during 1883 in order to impress Queen Ranavalona III. with the advantages of turning over her country to France.

For twelve years the struggle went on. The men of the Legion swarmed over the peninsula from Tongking to Cambodia. Battles were fought with the well-armed Annamese under almost every conceivable condition; and the Legioners faced death from behind stockades of bamboo with the

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same *sang-froid* that they exhibited when camped in the unhealthful marshes along the coast, where fever and cholera shortened the morning roll-calls.

Most memorable of the engagements was the heroic defense of Tuyen-Kwan, where for three months a short-handed battalion of the Foreign Legion and a handful of Tirailleurs stood off an army of fully 20,000 well-armed, drilled and acclimated Mongolians!

From December, 1884, until March, 1885, Colonel Dominé and his little force of six hundred successfully withstood a series of organized assaults. Barely one-half of the gallant garrison lived to see the rockets of the relieving column under Brière de l'Isle; and in unmarked trenches in the vicinage of Tuyen-Kwan, American adventurer, English "remittance man," Polish refugee, and German deserter, sleep side by side—Legioners all.

POSSIBLY the most spectacular incident of the Indo-Chinese campaign was the feat of one Patrick Bourke, said to have been a deserter from the English regiment of Connaught Rangers. During an attack upon three of the Dong-Song forts of the enemy it became noised about the ranks of the Legion that a certain fort sheltered a native distillery. When the information reached the ears of "Wild Paddy" he passed the word along to certain of his comrades and countrymen, and, to the intense surprise of the French officers, a score of men suddenly made an unauthorized sally in the direction of one of the forts.

Paddy was in the lead, reserving the magazine of his new Lebel for close quarters. The very audacity of the attempt assured its success. The Mongolians paused long enough to fire a scattering volley or two, and then decamped after setting fire to the stockade. Six of the Legioners lived to enter the enclosure, among them "Wild Paddy" with a part of his jaw shot away!

When reënforcements arrived on the scene they found the men enjoying their dearly purchased rice liquor. Under the wattle eaves of the burning distillery they found the dying Irishman, a wounded comrade beside him holding an earthen jar of liquor to the shattered face. Before the fire was extinguished his eyes had glazed in death; Paddy had had his last drink, and was buried where he fell.

A side expedition to Formosa in 1884 varied the monotony of the constant fighting in Indo-China, and after a bombardment of the forts of Kelung, a battalion of the Legion invested the town. Brillon, a French-Canadian member of the Legion, said to have been *persona non grata* to the British Government on account of a share in the first Riel uprising, distinguished himself by a single-handed combat with a band of Mongolians. He shot five or six of them, bayoneted three, and at the point of his Lebel marched a round dozen of them into the French camp as his prisoners. The enemy were all armed with muzzle-loaders, and had managed to wound the French-Canadian in several places. Brillon failed to survive his wounds, however, and died before the French Government had time to honor him.

Since the year of 1886, with the exception of an expedition to Dahomey in 1892, the Foreign Legion has been quartered in Algeria, actively engaged in policing the borders of the Algerian Sahara and in making life and property safe along the caravan routes between Algeria and the Sudan.

Although at different periods in its existence the Legion has been composed of mixed battalions of infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineers. It is at the present time composed of two regiments of infantry of five battalions each. Each battalion boasts of a company of mounted infantry, however, and tall stories are told of the distances which have been covered in a single day by one of these flying columns. To each two men of these mounted companies is assigned a sturdy mule. While one man walks, the other man rides the mule and also looks out for his comrade's equipment. The riding periods are shared equally, and it is nothing unusual for one of these companies to average fifty miles daily for several weeks, an impossible feat for regular cavalry.

ROMANCES OF THE LEGION

IN THE ranks of the Foreign Legion are men of all callings—men who can design a city, build it, fortify it, defend it, decorate its art galleries and write its history. Penmen there are, too, who may have been too clever with their pens in some

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other part of the world and have gone out to Algeria to live it down. Defaulters, Nihilists, looters, deserters from other armies, gamblers, "younger sons," unrobed priests, and fugitives from either oppression or justice march shoulder to shoulder with comrades possessing spotless pasts. France knows nothing of the antecedents of a prospective *Légionnaire*, nor does she care a jot. She is hiring fighters, not models of sobriety and righteousness.

An Italian Count or two swell the ranks of the Legion. Poor chaps, they have not the necessary *lire* to keep up their establishments at home, and it costs money to be an officer in the Italian army and to live in a manner befitting one's rank.

If a recruit hastily borrows a name from the legend on some passing cart, or from the label on an empty arrack bottle, it is strictly his own affair. He may need a little nudging at morning roll-call when his *nom de guerre* is called out and he fails to answer promptly, but the sergeant-majors are prone to overlook such lapses. They understand the situation and are not disposed to be inquisitive.

Among the non-commissioned officers of the Legion will be found West Pointers who failed to graduate. It might have been a lie about a cigarette, a question of too many cocktails, a hazing affair, a girl, or a check not honored—who can say? Verily, none of the comrades would stoop to ask leading questions as to a man's reasons for joining the Legion.

Though the pay is very small, many of the Legioners have private means, and opportunities for making extra-duty pay are numerous. The officers of the Legion are mostly French, it being practically impossible for an alien to work his way above the warrant rank, no matter how deserving. The men are paid off every five days, on the principle that semi-monthly payments would give too many men too much money at one and the same time. Even as it is, the frequent pay-days are called "Red Wine Days"—and red wine is very cheap in Algeria, of a heady quality, and an ideal beverage for a trooper's glorious drunk.

It is even whispered that there is an Englishman with the "V. C." among them—a man who not only lived to penetrate bleak and hostile Tibet under Younghusband, but who also survived to acknowledge his weakness when it came to face the devils which lurk in the bottom of a pewter-potful of bitter ale.

As is to be expected, there are many men of the Legion who can never return to the land of their birth without fearing the tap upon the shoulder. That many of them are "wanted" for one reason or another is but natural in an open-armed corps like the *Etrangère*.

THOMAS MOORE'S son was of the Legion. Quinn and Jordan, two Americans, were the means of nearly embroiling France with England in 1892 by reason of an unauthorized raid into British Nigeria. Mehl and Weber, two Germans, have their names upon the Legion's roll of honor; as have Cesari, an Italian; Bacque, a Spaniard; and a Russian exile of a prominent family who chose to assume the name of "Ruspoli."

Some of the American soldiers of fortune under the *drapeau* of the Legion include men who have been through the Cuban, Porto Rican and Philippine campaign. One or two of them sport a jade watch charm, or the memories of the temporary possession of some other bit of loot from Pekin.

Many of the Spanish men of the Legion saw their first battles in Cuba under the red-and-yellow flag of the Dons. Others are gaining their first taste of active service under the French Tricolor, for in their own country military service is not only compulsory, but the wars are not infrequently unpopular.

Less than two years ago an American named Garford made a brave fight for life at an oasis. With the help of two comrades he held a score of Bedouin robbers at bay until aid arrived. Their ammunition was nearly exhausted, and had their comrades been delayed another hour their lives would surely have been taken.

"I was saving one shot for myself," explained Garford to another American in the relieving company of mounted infantry. The grim remark was accompanied by a significant pat upon the brown barrel of his Lebel and was readily understood by the other American in the madder-red *képi* bearing a star instead of a number.

Forty-eight miles south of Oran lies the town of Sidi-bel-Abbes, the headquarters of the First Regiment. In the regimental Hall of Honor are trophies from every quar-

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ter of the world. Upon the walls of the *salon* are two-score-odd mammoth paintings by a master hand, depicting famous battle-scenes in far-off lands. In each of these battles the men of the Legion took prominent part.

In the rear of the quarters at Sidi-bel-Abbes will be found the regimental cemetery of the Foreign Legion, each grave marked by a simple wooden cross bearing a number. Merely a fraction of the brave men who have given their lives for France rest here, however, as the swamps of Madagascar and the Mexican lowlands bear mute testimony.

As for the uniform of the men of the Legion, they have no silk burnoose of flaming vermilion as have the native Algerian regiments of Turcos; their Winter tunics are not heavily frogged and trimmed with fur as are those of the Spahis. Nor do they present such a brilliant appearance as the rank and file of the Chasseurs d'Afrique. And yet, when they enter a café and give their order they are usually waited upon before either Tirailleur, Chasseur or Zouave. The brown men—the Spahi cavalrymen and the Turco infantrymen—are wont to take a back seat when men of the *Étrangère* are present, for there is a color line in French North Africa, and the white men of the Legion are jealous guardians of their privileges.

Should the man of the Legion clap his hands and request a different song, a special dance or an unusual mixed drink, the oily proprietor of the *café chantant* hastens to oblige the gentleman with the red *képi*. But should a Zouave make a similar request, his desires would not only be ignored but he would be seized by the abundant slack of his trousers forthwith and cast into the dry regions of outer darkness.

Not that the men of the *Légion Étrangère* are bullies and rowdies. Far from it. On the other hand, many of them are men of intelligence and breeding. They are themselves under strict discipline; and so, when out on a lark with their meager pay in their pockets, they see to it that they get the full value of their money in either dry or liquid refreshment.

Without the *Salle d'Honneur*, within the four gates of Sidi-bel-Abbes, lie the barracks of the five thousand men of the First Regiment. Sixty miles, as the crow flies, to the southeastward are found the headquarters of the Second Regiment at Saida.

Although the officers of the Foreign Legion are of French nativity as a rule, now and again an alien earns a commission through some extraordinary act of bravery or show of devotion in behalf of "La Belle France." It would seem as though France were a little suspicious of intrusting command of a company or battalion of her *Étrangère* to some alien officer, who might some day find the country of his nativity at war with the flag of his adoption.

When a man who has once held a commission in some alien army seeks a berth in the Foreign Legion for one reason or another, he has but to exhibit to the French recruiting officer a photograph of himself in an officer's uniform. His true name is then neither desired nor insisted upon, nor are his reasons for joining the Legion sought. His pathway to the non-commissioned ranks is smoothed, and, other things being equal, his future is bright.

Ten thousand of them in all—Finns, Poles, Italians, Spaniards, Germans, English, Irish and Americans. They play hard, sleep well, fight with all the insouciance of confirmed fatalists, and it is perhaps quite unnecessary to add that most of them die young.

France has reason to be proud of them, although they have but little reason to be proud of her. She admires them and uses them up first because they leave few French widows. They fight for her because she provides them with an asylum and asks no embarrassing questions. Also she offers the nearest approach to continual active service—the dream of the thoroughbred trooper.

The greatest battles of the Foreign Legion seem to be of the past, for France is at peace with the nations of the earth. Algeria is fairly secure, Madagascar is satisfied, Indo-China is tranquil, and the Amazons of Dahomey have sheathed their spears. But the womb of Africa is heavy with possibilities, and Morocco, the last of the Barbary watermelons, seems ripe for the slicing.

When the day comes, it will be remembered that *La Légion Étrangère* has been stationed within striking distance for years. Should it be an armed invasion of the Powers, the Tricolor will surely be there; and in the vanguard of the French contingent, or wherever the fighting waxes the hottest, will be seen the sky-blue tunics and madder-red *képis* of the Foreign Legion.

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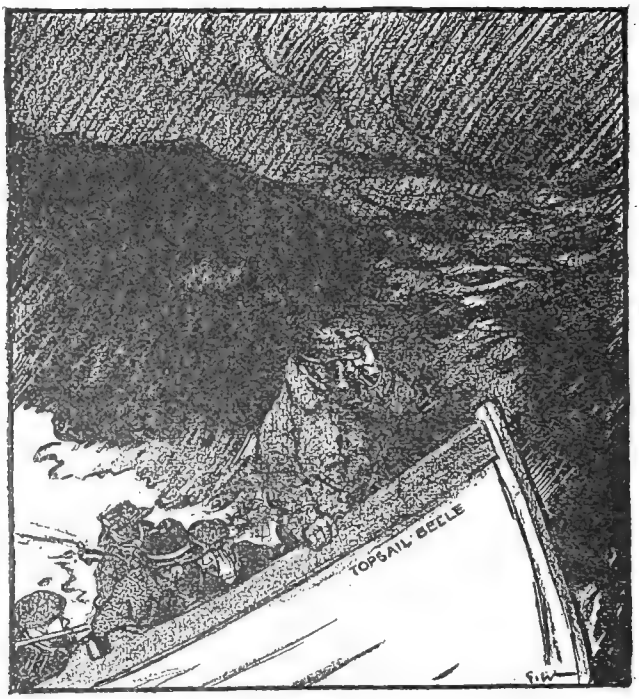

A Skin Game at Deception Island

By
FREDERICK
WILLIAM
WALLACE

IT ALL happened with the coming of Red-Haired McDonald to Anchorville. A sealing schooner had spewed him ashore in Halifax with money to burn, and, seaman-like, McDonald held high carnival for a delirious fortnight. When his money was gone he sobered up with the resolution of doing the prodigal son act before the old folks "somewhere up th' Bay o' Fundy." A friendly skipper of a packet schooner carried the prodigal as far as Anchorville and with a drink and a blessing left him to work his own traverse to the table and the fatted calf.

Ashore in the little Nova Scotia port and disgustingly sober, the prospect of going home "broke" began to appeal with decreasing insistence to the erring one.

Give him a stanch vessel, a good crew, and he knew where a fortune was waiting for the adventurous one. It was a long distance away—down at the foot of the world. Wild winds, wild seas and pitiless cold would have to be fought by the men who dared to take the chance. Then came the memory of his debauch in Halifax. Maybe he talked too much? Mayhap he dropped valuable information into ears which understood? Curse the rum! It had ruined him, and always would while he retained a hankering for potent spirits.

With a deprecatory shudder at his own shortcomings, McDonald turned away from the wharf and, making his way up-town, dropped into Morrison's Pool Room. He didn't know what led him there. It was warm, and perhaps there was a chance of picking up something.

The room was dense with tobacco smoke. One or two men, presumably fishermen, were knocking the balls about, while a big, rawboned fellow, dressed in good clothes, but collarless, was holding forth to the gang who lolled on the benches and practised expectorative shots at the brass cuspidor. The big man was evidently disgusted with something, and McDonald listened to the growling monotone of his voice.

"Aye," rumbled the speaker. "Fishin' ain't w'uth a —— these days. I'll quit th' business for good, ef th' luck don't change. Here we are, jest in from a three weeks' trip from th' Cape shore an' Brown's, an' what hev I got to show fur it? Nawthin' but a miserable fifty thousand, mostly hake at that—not enough ter pay fur all th' gear we lost, or even fur th' herrin' bait we used

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up. Last trip we did about as good—fed th' dog-fish with most o' our bait, bust our fores'l, an' had ter stay out so long that th' shares went ter pay th' grub bill. I've lost enough this Summer ter pay fur a new vessel. Aye! a new vessel!"

"Why don't ye lay her up fur a spell, Cap'n?" inquired a man.

"Lay her up?" grunted the other. "I might as well do that as lose money every time I make a set. I'll probably have ter lay her up, as none o' the gang'll sail with me agen. They think I'm a hoodoo. Ef I c'd do anythin' else with that vessel, barrin' fishin', I'd do it."

And Captain Bartley Simons turned dejectedly away.

AS HE sauntered out of the door, a sun-browned man with red hair plucked him by the elbow.

"Well? What's th' matter with you?" growled Simons, as he paused at the threshold.

"Come outside. I want to talk to you—particular."

"What's ter hinder ye talkin' particular here?" snarled the skipper. "I don't owe you anythin', do I?"

Without answering, McDonald caught the disgruntled fisherman by the arm and swung him outside.

"Excuse me," he said. "My name's McDonald. I come from Maitland way. Used to be mate—sealing schooner. I h'ard ye growlin' agin' yer luck inside there, an' I think I kin put ye on to a pot o' money, ef ye'll take a risk."

Simons glared at the red-haired one in surprise.

"Ye'll put me on to a pot o' money?" he repeated. "An' how in th' devil's name kin a red-topped scallawag like you put me on to a pot o' money? Why don't ye git it fur yerself?"

With an insistence that was not to be denied McDonald piloted Captain Simons to a quiet spot on the adjacent wharf.

"Sit down," he commanded, and Simons obeyed instinctively. Somehow this McDonald was like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and "had his will."

"I used ter be mate on the *Topsail Belle*—a ninety-ton sealin' schooner. Three weeks ago I got back inter Halifax after fourteen months in th' Southern Ocean. When I drew my share—it was quite a wad—I blew it all in, inside o' two weeks, an' now I'm broke—No! no! I ain't goin' ter make a touch on you, Cap'n—sit still! I've a good fifty-dollar watch left yet, an' a ring which I got in Monte Video w'uth another twenty.

"Now, I sh'd ha' hung on to that there money, but you know th' way. Ye start with a little nip o' rum and end up with gettin' outside o' a puncheon o' th' rot-gut stuff. That's what I did, an' woke up in a shack on Grafton Street, dead broke. My watch an' ring were inside o' a pair o' seaboots which I had in my bag, an' that's all I got left. That'll do fur interduckshun, an' explain why I'm here. Now fur th' business.

"V'y'ge afore last I went with my uncle, Pete McDonald on a sealin' trip to th' Sou' Georgias—away off Cape Horn. We got down there all right an' did some fair sealin', but my uncle had h'ard that seals were plentiful in the Sou' Shetlands, so we squared away fur there. As it was Summertime down south, we made th' run inter Bransfield's Straits without much trouble——"

"Did ye git any o' them critters there?" interrupted Simons, visibly interested.

"Did we git seals? Well, I sh'd say so! Th' blessed islands an' rocks were covered with them, an' it did not take us long ter load pelts up ter th' hatch coamings. We made a fortune——"

"Huh!" grunted Simons sarcastically.

"And lost it," continued the other. "It was this way. While rootin' around in th' Strait, we discovered an island to th' west'ard that was shaped like a horseshoe. Isla Decepcion, the Argentinos call it. It looked like a snug harbor, so we hauled th' schooner inter th' middle o' it through a narrow passage a cable's length in width. An' unloadin' th' skins, we dressed them in Liverpool salt ready fur th' long trip to th' Cape. On goin' out o' th' passage, we ran on th' rocks to th' starboard side, an' knocked a hole in th' schooner's bottom.

"We unloaded her to get her lightened, but as soon as we got all the skins an' stuff out o' her, she lifted in the tide, capsized an' sank. This left us in a fine fix, an' as there was some twenty of us all told, we jest managed ter save provisions enough to ha' lasted th' gang fur eight days—short allowance at that."

Bartley Simons nodded his head, and as

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the other paused, he reached into his vest pocket and offered a particularly bilious looking cigar to the speaker.

"Smoke up, mate," he rumbled. "I allus gives a cigar to th' feller that can spin a good yarn. I believe yours, so fire away!"

McDonald regarded the weed with a doubtful air, and after a suspicious sniff, lighted it, and continued:

"As we did not want ter spend a Winter on a blasted, barren rock, we cached th' pelts in a cave an', takin' to th' boats, steered a course fur Elephant Island, four hundred miles to th' no'theast."

"That's some pull," commented the fisherman.

"Aye, it was some pull, you bet. Four hundred bitter miles to go—over a sea where th' smallest waves are like mountains, an' th' month o' May comin' on. It was no joke, I kin tell ye. We had h'ard that the Argentine Government had established a depot on the island fur shipwrecked sailors, and we cal'lated if we got there we'd spend th' Winter an' chance bein' picked up in th' Spring. Ye see, it was gettin' so late in th' year—Winter was comin' on down south—an' th' whalers an' sealin' craft had all gone to the nor'rard.

"Th' second day after we left Deception Island we ran inter a heavy sou'west gale, an' my uncle an' th' four men in his boat disappeared. Later we lost sight o' the other, an' never saw either o' them again. This left two boats with five men in each, an' we rode th' buster out by lashin' oars together an' headin' up to th' sea with them as a drog. I was sorry ter lose my uncle, for he was a fine feller, but the other men were an infernally hard crowd—mostly cod-haulers from Saint John's, Newf'nland.

"Next day we lost the other boat. She was swamped by a big comber, an' th' crew in her went down like stones in the icy, cold water with such heavy clothes on. That left us alone—four men an' myself, an' for th' nex' three days we had a devilish hard time. Look at me left han'!"

As he spoke, he thrust out his left hand, from which the third and fourth fingers were missing. Simons gazed on the sight unaffectedly, and McDonald resumed his narrative.

"I lost both o' my little toes an' them two claws by frostbite, an' one o' th' men in th' boat with me was frozen to death. He was as stiff as a frozen cod when I rolled him over th' gunnel. ——, but it was cold! We pulled on the oars for a spell, sang a lot o' silly songs, an' began ter count th' number o' strokes we pulled. For th' whole o' one night I tugged at them oars, countin', countin', countin', until I was up in th' millions. I was goin' batty then, but it kept me warm.

"We were picked up by a Scowegian whaler hangin' on to th' last minute, but the other fellers died when we came in sight o' the East Falkland. I landed at Port Stanley, made my way to Monte Video, an' findin' th' *Topsail Belle* lyin' there an' lookin' for a mate, I got th' berth. On her we worked around th' Crozets an' th' Indian Ocean grounds, an' I kep' a shut mouth regardin' th' pelts in th' cave on Deception Island. Ef I had told them, they would ha' scoffed th' lot an' probably bounced me in Cape Town."

McDONALD paused and scrutinized the fisherman's face with hungry eyes. Bartley knocked the ash off his odoriferous perfecto and spoke slowly:

"I presume, now, that you want ter git them skins?"

"Yes, by Godfrey! I want to get them. I want to get my hands on some money, an' you're th' man that can help me!"

"How?"

"Well, ye hev a schooner. It's yer own I take it. By yer own sayin' ye would do anythin' with her, instead o' losin' money fishin'. Fit her out for me, an' I divide half with you. There's a good four thousand pelts layin' in that cave—all salted, dressed an' in an atmosphere where they'll keep forever. On th' basis o' twenty-five dollars a skin—they sell Cape Horn skins in London for thirty-five to forty dollars—that would make around one hundred thousand cold, hard plunks!"

Captain Simons recoiled.

"One hundred thousand dollars in sealskins! Holy Smoke! what a fortune!" For a moment he pondered, then rising hastily, he grabbed McDonald by the arm. "Come to home with me," he cried. "I want ter think an' talk it over. You may be lyin', but I'll soon find out. An' ef ye are, th' Lord help ye! One hundred thousand dollars! Holy Smoke, but it beats fishin'!"

And taking the red-haired man by the arm as if he were afraid to lose him, he led the way to his home.

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McDONALD had to undergo a gruelling cross-examination under Simon's questing tongue. Shipping records were looked up and the loss of the schooner verified under the Government record of "Missing Ships."

McDonald's name was also enumerated among the crew, and when he saw the fateful record, he suddenly thought of his folks at home.

"By Heck!" he cried. "They'll think I'm dead. Well, I won't bother 'em now. When I git my paws on th' dollars I'll go home." Dismissing the subject from his mind, he launched into fitting out details with the now enthusiastic Bartley Simons.

"Now," said the latter, "I'll provision th' vessel for a six months' trip, an' I'll hev ter git a cook an' at least six men. I wonder ef any o' my gang would go? They're only fishermen, but they know th' vessel an' kin handle her better than any o' yer deep-water fellers. You'll do th' navigatin', an' we'll stand watch an' watch."

And far into the night they discussed ways and means. Thus came the red-haired man to Anchorville. The man who came from nowhere into Morrison's Pool Room, and left the town with Bartley Simon's seventy-five-ton schooner *Roberta S.* and eight of Anchorville's sons. Where they went to, nobody knew. Simon's gave it out that he was running to Newfoundland for dry fish, and maybe a West Indies voyage. He would be gone some considerable time, he calculated—maybe three months, maybe six months. It was nobody's business but his own. And with this enigmatical answer, Anchorville had to be satisfied.

Down the Bay of Fundy sped the little vessel under all sail—four lowers, balloon and staysail. Once outside in open water, Simons informed the curious crew of his mission, and McDonald supplied details. They took the news easily, as if a trip to the south'ard of Cape Horn were an ordinary "shacking" trip to Brown's Bank. "If Bartley Simons was going, they would go!" And the *Roberta*, with McDonald laying the courses, swept hot-foot through her old jogging territory off Cape Sable and swung her nose for the Western Islands and the North East Trades.

Since they left the Nova Scotia port for their long trip to the south'ard McDonald's mind was in a state of unrest. He would sit for hours upon the cabin lockers, smoking, and with a face puckered in anxious thought. One night he unburdened his mind to Simons.

"Skipper," said he. "I'm afraid we may have a tussle ter git them skins."

"How's that?" exclaimed the other in surprise.

"Well," replied McDonald slowly, "I'm thinkin' there are others after them. It's only fair that ye sh'd know. You're puttin' up th' schooner an' th' money an' standin' th' biggest loss ef we don't git them. Ye see, when I got paid off from that schooner I went ashore with Barney Olsen, her skipper, an' we got tanked up together. Now I hev a faint idea that I talked a bit too much to that joker. He's a quick-witted devil an' can see through a bollard further than most people. Now, jest afore we sailed, I looks up a Halifax paper an' sees this little paragraph. Here it is."

The sealing schooner *Topsail Belle*, recently home from a successful voyage in the Indian Ocean, has left again for the Falklands and the sealing territory around the Crozets and Kerguelen Islands. On being asked by our correspondent the reason for such a quick return after a two weeks' stay in port, Captain Olsen stated that as the sailing was so good lately in the Southern Ocean, he wished to make but one more voyage and settle down ashore. For the past week, the *Topsail Belle* has been on the railway, and was thoroughly overhauled and recoppered. She carries five men of her former crew.

"Well?" queried Simons. "What d'ye think?"

"What do I think?" reiterated McDonald. "I think that Barney Olsen is at present slammin' th' *Topsail Belle* fur Deception Island as hard as she kin go. He ain't goin' to no Crozets nor Kerguelen Islands. Sealin' war nawthin' extraordinary last v'yge, an' furthermore, he niver intended to leave Halifax so soon. I know why he left. I opened my silly mug, an' he got wise. Curse him!"

Simons growled.

"Huh! That's a nice thing ter tell me arter we're well on our way. Sh'd I turn back?"

"Turn back be ——!" cried the other. "We'll git them skins, never fear, even ef I hev ter kill Olsen an' his crowd ter git them—th' thievin' beach-comber! He's only got a week's start o' us, an' his schooner ain't any better at sailin' than this vessel. Slam her ahead an' don't worry."

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Having, as it were, shared his depression with Captain Simons, McDonald began to get optimistic, and under his influence the other forgot the ominous import of the intelligence.

FROM then on it was drive, drive, drive. Down the Northeast Trades, through the Doldrums, over the Line and the Doldrums again, and into the steady blow of the Southeast Trades the gallant little fishing schooner went, and, taking to her new traverses like an old deep-water clipper, she reeled off the knots in great style. Being easy and quick to handle, she made small bones of the fluky cat's-paws common to the Doldrum latitudes and drifted like a ghost with the least flicker of a breeze.

In the steady, blue-skied Trades she scurried along with balloon, maintopmast staysail and gaff-topsails set, while her crew would read the trailing patent log with wondering eyes and swear that "it beat fishin'." A pampero off the Rio de la Plata caught her with kites up and for a few minutes there was some excitement as she rolled half her deck under water, but before she had drained the water off her, it had passed and all was sunshine again.

Forty days from Anchorville the *Roberta S.* made the East Falklands and stood in for Port Stanley. Arriving in the harbor, tenanted by a large fleet of schooners, store hulks, and a dismasted sailing ship, McDonald and Simons slung a banker's dory over the side and rowed ashore. In an hour they were back with a dory load of provisions.

"H'ist th' dory in, fellers!" yelled Simons. "Git the anchor up! Up on yer mains'l there!"

All hands tallied on to the mainsail halliards, and after jigging up the big sail as taut as a board, the windlass brakes were pumped with frenzied energy. Scarcely stopping to seize the anchor, the schooner was jibed and ran out of Port Stanley harbor under her mainsail.

"What's th' racket, Skipper?" queried Tom Slocum.

"That other schooner, th' *Topsail Belle*, jest left here a couple o' days ago. Git th' muslin on her an' don't stan' gapin' thar'! Hustle, fellers! Up on yer fores'l an' jumbo! Look alive!"

By dint of much strenuous exertion and bad language, in twenty minutes the little schooner was "dressed" and racing through the long gray-green rollers like a blooded horse. McDonald paced the weather quarter with an anxious eye to leeward, while Simons sat astride of the wheel-box and steered, his leathern jaws working spasmodically upon a quid of niggerhead.

"Here's where we're goin' ter git some weather, Simons," remarked McDonald. "Southern Ocean weather—wind an' seas!"

Simons spat carelessly.

"Huh! I guess me'n an' th' boys ain't scared o' weather anywhere. I cal'late ef we kin stan' th' Bay o' Fundy in Wintertime, we kin stan' anythin' we git down hereabouts. Bill Simms, come aft an' relieve wheel! Sou' west b' south."

They got weather as McDonald prophesied. Leaving the Falklands astern the wind hauled ahead and stiffened, and before nightfall the *Roberta* was ratching down the parallels to a buster from the southward and bucking over tremendous seas. The light sails were taken in, and all through the night they kept driving into the gale, which hauled more to the westward as the Horn was opened out.

The fishermen regarded the huge seas with no signs of consternation, and even when the little vessel was performing antics among the overfalls of the Burdwood Bank, they grudgingly "allowed it wuz a bit worse than th' tide rips off'n Brier Island." The swing of the Westerly and the Pacific Antarctic Drift coming around the Horn and meeting the seas flying south with the prevailing Norther on the Atlantic coast of South America cause these dangerous overfalls—great combers with breaking crests—and many a good ship has been sent to the bottom by them.

Before many hours among them the crew of the *Roberta* were forced to admit that they had never seen seas like them before. The wind forbade the mainsail, and the banker's riding-sail had to be hoisted, while the foresail was double reefed. Heavy seas broke aboard, flooding the decks and streaming down into forecastle and cabin. Men had to be careful in going aft or forward, and the two at the wheel were lashed to the wheel-box. By daylight it was too much for her, and Simons sung out:

"Come on, fellers. Douse that jumbo an' foresail. We'll hev ter heave her to."

While endeavoring to roll up the foresail,

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McDonald and Slocum were caught by a big sea which broke over the bow, and under a ton of water, were washed into the belly of the sail. Enveloped in the slack, smothering canvas and the water contained in it, the two men had a narrow escape from being drowned.

"By th' 'Tarnal Thunder!" cried McDonald, when he recovered his breath. "I've had many a close call, but I'll be darned ef I ever was nearly drowned in th' belly o' a fores'l!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Simons when they came aft. "Sailed th' seas to be drowned in a ditch, or rather a fores'l! That's a new one on me!"

She was hove-to for ten hours, wheel lashed, and all hands essaying to stay in their bunks below, while the schooner reeled drunkenly over the mighty combers. By the time she had drifted to leeward of the Bank the seas eased down and sail was made again.

For fourteen long and weary days they drove to the southward, clawing on long tacks into south and southwesterly gales. With the pitching and tossing, the cold, and the almost continual rain, all hands were beginning to weary of the voyage, and it came as a pleasant break in the monotony when one of the crew, who had climbed to the fore cross-trees, sung out,

"Land Ho!"

McDonald tumbled up the cabin companion—the sleep still in his eyes.

"Where away?" he bawled.

"Two p'ints off'n port bow!"

"All right," said McDonald. "That sh'd be Livingstone Island. Keep her as she goes."

The schooner raised the land rapidly, and as the sun rose it illuminated the gray, sterile cliffs and rocks to port. Upon them the mighty billows of the "Forties" burst and thundered in acres of foam, while, as the mists of the chilly Antarctic morning dissipated, the loom of a high, snow-covered mountain could be seen. McDonald recognized the place at a glance.

"That's Livingstone Island, boys. We won't be long now afore we make our destination. How's she pointin' now?"

"Wes'-sou'west," answered Simons from the wheel.

"Keep her so!" And the red-headed navigator busied himself in taking a four-point bearing.

III

DECEPTION ISLAND lies in latitude sixty-two degrees fifty-six minutes South, and longitude sixty degrees, thirty-three minutes West, and is one of the South Shetland Archipelago. The island is of volcanic origin and of the horseshoe shape peculiar to the atolls of the South Seas. Composed of a vast heap of lava rocks, boulders and ashes, the island rises sheer, forbidding and gaunt looking, and upon its precipitous cliffs the long seas of the Southern Ocean fume and rage in acres of white water. Sterile, blasted and dead, it is the home of countless penguins that march up and down the cliffs and ledges in regiments and render the region melancholy by their weird and peculiar cries. On the scant rocks that fringe the island at certain spots the Cape Horn seal disports himself with herd or family, and in the darkness of the Antarctic Winter the drifting bergs and floes reel and grind on the iron rocks as they swing north on the flood of the Drift.

The interior of the island is a vast, placid lagoon, undisturbed by the strong gales of the high latitudes and completely rimmed in by the stark cliffs. Close inshore there is a depth of thirty fathoms, but no sounding-line has yet plumbed the depth in the center. Vessels entering this silent lake come in through a narrow channel—a break in the island's rim—taking care to avoid a spur of sunken rocks on the port hand. These rocks were the doom of McDonald's vessel on his former voyage to the island.

As this passage is but a cable's length in width and but a cleft in the cliffs, it is hard to discern from seaward. Thus the name—Deception Island.

It was dark when the *Roberta*, with McDonald conning her, passed Sail Rock and ran down to leeward of Nature's monumental deceit. Hauling their wind, they worked in to the entrance of the lagoon as close as they dared and, letting go the headsails, hove the anchor over in twenty fathoms. Instead of chain cable, the eight-inch manila fishing hawser was bent on—"for good an' sufficient future reasons," the enigmatical McDonald explained.

When the cabin clock of the *Roberta* pointed to the hour of midnight, McDonald called all hands aft. The schooner was roll-

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ing slightly to the long swell in the lee of the island, and the water chirped and gurgled around her rusty, sea-washed hull. The gang came down into the cabin, quietly and like shadows.

"Now," said McDonald softly, when all were assembled, "the other craft may be inside that lagoon, an' she may not. She may have reached the island an' cleared out again, but I don't think so, as we must ha' bin on her heels all th' way from th' Falklands. I have a hunch that she's inside thar', as they'll spend some time searchin' fur that cave among them boulders. Ef she ain't thar', it'll be plain sailin' for us, but I'll lay my hat that she is."

The red-haired man paused and gave a glance at the clock:

"Th' Skipper an' I hev a plan which we'll carry out to-night without any delay if we mean ter git what we've come for. Cookie and Morris 'll stand by th' vessel here. The rest of us'll take two dories an' go inter th' lagoon. Ef th' other vessel is layin' there, we'll board her an' try ter work her outside here. Git th' hatches off, sails loosed an' halliards clear. We'll hev ter do some spry work, maybe."

The men nodded, voicing their endorsement of the plan by stolid grunts.

"How about guns?" queried Sam Johnson. "Them sealer fellers are all armed."

McDonald opened a locker and produced three revolvers, while the Skipper drew two repeating rifles from under his bunk mattress.

"They're all loaded," said McDonald. "Th' Skipper an' I will take a revolver each —Johnson kin take the other. Slocum an' Corby kin take th' rifles. You other fellers kin use what ye like. Come on, now, man th' dory tackles an' git two dories over."

Simons tumbled into one dory with three of the gang, while McDonald commanded the other with Johnson and Slocum. With hearts beating hard with excitement, they pulled over the long swells for the entrance —McDonald leading to show the way. As the passage was to leeward, it was sheltered from the heavy swells which thundered on the western shores of the Island, and they had no difficulty in working through.

"Now, fellers," cried McDonald softly, "pull strong an' quiet, for ef they sh'd hear us, we'd be shark's meat in two shakes. Ef they're here at all, they'll be up at Pendulum Cove, three miles up ter starboard. Give way!"

Silently and like a flotilla of ghosts they pulled the long miles up through the quiet darkness of this curious inland lake. Outside, the thunderous roar of the surf came but as a low murmur, while the eery silence of the crater pool was broken by the hoarse cry of a penguin or the squawk of a sea-bird as it flapped through the night. Overhead, the stars blazed with the scintillating glitter of the high latitudes, and the gaunt cliffs were shadowed in somber black on the waters—the star reflections dancing in the eddies left by the boats.

"She's there!" came in an exultant hiss from McDonald. "They've lit a fire on th' cliff. Easy as ye go, boys."

Simons pulled up:

"What d'ye intend to do?"

"You board her to port an' batten th' gang down in her foc'sle, an' I'll attend to the afterguard. Make no noise, an' keep well in th' shadow o' th' rocks. Give way!"

And McDonald breathed a prayer for success.

IV

THE lookout man upon the *Topsail Belle* was sleepy and leaned against the foremast, his pipe between his teeth. With eyelids as heavy as lead, he shivered and closed them at intervals.

As he gazed with hazy eyes at the fire on the bank of the lagoon he sprang into momentary wakefulness on hearing a slight splash, but with a muttered "—— sea-lion havin' a bath!" he relapsed again into a semi-somnolent state. The tired feeling began to take complete possession of him, while the snores of the foc'sle gang coming up through the open scuttle acted as a lullaby upon the watchman's soporific nerve, and stowing his pipe inside the furl of the foresail, he crossed his arms and found a soft streak in the mast for his back.

When he awoke again, it was suddenly and with a smothering sensation. Regaining his faculties, his slow mind took in the fact that a heavy hand had him by the throat and a voice was hissing in his ear.

"Make a sound, yuh swab, an' I'll choke ye!"

He opened his mouth to shout, but a plug of balled up marline filled his facial orifice, and he was unable to utter a sound. Gent-

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ly, but with tremendous strength, his assailant bore him to the deck and, casting off a coil of halliard, lashed him from neck to heels in the strong hemp rope.

"Got th' beggar fast?" inquired a hoarse voice.

"Aye, for sure," answered McDonald out of the gloom. "He's sarved with good foretops'l halliard from head t' foot, an' a hank o' mousin' in his mug ter keep him quiet. Draw that foc'sle hatch, there, Corby, an' stan' by it with yer gun. Slocum kin do th' same aft."

Silent forms flitted around the sealing schooner's decks in stockinged feet, and McDonald peered down the open hatch, feeling with his hands.

"They're all aboard," he whispered to Simons. "They must ha' found th' cave without any trouble. Now, fellers, we've got ter git th' fores'l on her an' git outside with th' little air blowin' down th' lagoon."

"How about the anchor?" growled a man. "There's three turns o' chain around th' windlass an' a good pile in th' box. We can't start haulin' all their cable over th' windlass ter let it go!"

"Come for'ard with me," replied McDonald. "There's a shackle at fifty fathoms. He ain't got any more than forty paid out here, so overhaul th' cable until ye come to th' shackle an' knock it out. Lively, there, lively."

With the clank and clatter of the chain cable rumbling over the iron-shod windlass barrel, and the horrible creaking from the foresail blocks as the throat and peak halliards were manned, the captives below awoke to sudden activity and commenced to hammer on the drawn scuttles.

"What's th' row?" roared a deep voice, which McDonald recognized as that of Olsen, the skipper. "Open th' hatch, Jim!"

Jim was unfortunately unable to reply, but McDonald answered. "Good mornin', Cap'n Olsen, an' how's yer liver this mornin'?"

"Who th' —— that?" cried Olsen in surprise.

"Why, who sh'd it be but Danny McDonald come aboard for a social call an' ter git th' seal pelts he told you about up in Halifax. Oh, but it's you that is th' wily bird, Captain Barney Olsen! Ye put great credit in th' talk o' drunken men. Well, thank heaven, I kin remember who I was drinkin' with, an' git busy on my own hook." And while McDonald was jibing his late skipper, the schooner was gliding, ghostlike, for the passage.

"Say, Mac," cried Corby from for'ard, "they're startin' ter break th' foc'sle scuttle. What shall I do?"

"Give 'em a hail, an' shoot through th' door!"

Corby carried out his instructions, and silence reigned forward. Not so, aft. Here the hunters berthed and had their rifles, and, after their first surprise, they commenced firing indiscriminately through skylight and planking—making things unpleasant for those on deck. McDonald at the wheel began to get desperate, and sang out:

"Cap'n Olsen, hold on a minute!"

"Aye!" growled a voice, while the firing stopped.

"I jest want ter say that ef we hev any more signs o' resistance from youse fellers or any more shootin', I'll pile this schooner up on th' rocks an' set fire to her! An' furthermore, I'll take all yer boats an' leave ye on this blasted island to die like rats! I mean what I say, an' by ——, I'll carry it out!"

A LONG silence ensued after McDonald proclaimed his threat, and, the breeze freshening with the dawn, they made a successful run through the passage. Meanwhile, Simons and the others were busily engaged in getting the sealskin pelts up on deck.

Swinging around the point to the eastward of the Island, they ran down on the *Roberta* as she rode to her anchor.

"Stand by!" yelled McDonald.

By a piece of smart seamanship on his part, they ran alongside the fishing schooner and, cutting the foresail halliards, Simons had the sail down by the run. On the shout from Mac, the cook and Morris caught a rope and made it fast to the *Roberta's* fore-bitts. The *Topsail Belle* swung around and both schooners lay bow to bow, as, creaking and grinding, they surged into the long Westerly swell.

With feverish haste the *Roberta's* crew began to load the bundles of pelts aboard. Sweating and panting in the chilly air, they labored like Titans to get the valuable spoil out of the sealer's hold. The banging of rifle-butts against the hatches and the shouts of the prisoners started afresh and

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acted as incentives to fiercer exertions. A voice cried out from below,

"Mac! You've got th' upper hand. Let's divide th' skins an' call quits."

"No, no, Captain Olsen!" answered McDonald sarcastically. "You're too kind. They belong ter me an' my friends, an' why sh'd I give you any? Besides, seals are plentiful around th' Crozets an' Kerguelen. Arter ye've made a trip thar' ye'll make yer fortune an' settle down ashore. Them's yer own words to th' noospaper in Halifax. No, no, me bird! I'll take 'em all—ye'll be able ter catch us easy when ye're flyin' light."

A volley of impotent curses greeted this sally, and Mac laughed easily.

While the last bundles of pelts were being hove aboard of the *Roberta*, McDonald went around the sealing schooner with an ax. With a blow he smashed the compass to flinders, and striding to the mainsail halliards, he cut them and hauled the ends through the blocks. The main-sheet he chopped through in several places, and a few telling cuts put the wheel-gear out of business. Simons, with a fisherman's bait-knife, severed the forestaysail halliards and cut all the lanyards of the standing rigging.

When the last bundle was hove aboard, McDonald yelled:

"For th' vessel, now, fellers! Jump!"

With a rush the fishermen piled aboard of their vessel.

"Up on yer mainsail!" yelled Simons, and McDonald with the ax cut through the manila fishing hawser and cast the *Topsail Belle* adrift.

The sealing schooner had drifted to leeward but a scant hundred yards, when a mob of men poured out of her cabin with yells and curses of rage. Olsen stood up on the cabin and, grasping a gun, opened fire.

Bang! Bang! Zip! Zip! and the bullets began to chip and splinter on the *Roberta's* rail and cabin trunk. The gang were hauling up the mainsail, when the fusillade commenced, and McDonald was at the wheel.

"Belay yer halliards!" he commanded. "An' lie down! We'll soon git out o' their range."

With the mainsail half-way up the mast and bulging like a balloon, they ran down the Straits to the eastward, McDonald sitting on deck beside the wheel, steering.

For a moment the firing stopped, and Simons looked cautiously over the rail.

"They've tumbled in to the dories, and are pulling like the very devil after us!"

McDonald glanced hurriedly around.

"Boys!" he said. "We'll hev ter git that mainsail up, an' th' fores'l." In spite of the occasional bullets which bit the woodwork around the fore and main masts, the gang managed to haul the sails up, and wing and wing they ran before the wind, quickly leaving the dories astern.

Standing alongside the wheel-box, McDonald watched them stop rowing, and waving his hand derisively to Captain Olsen who was standing up in the bow of the foremost dory, he shouted,

"Good-by, Barney!"

He was about to say something more, but a well-aimed bullet from the enraged Olsen's rifle missed his head by a hair's breadth and ripped through the mainsail.

"——!" growled Simons. "It ain't safe to palaver with these jokers. That was a narrow shave."

"Ho! ho!" laughed McDonald in great glee. "Cleaned out, by Godfrey! 'Twill take them half a day ter reeve that runnin' gear again, an' I'm thinkin' they'll have ter steer home by starlight or a codhauler's nose. Ef they git their wheel fixed by termorrer, they're doin' well. I cut th' taykles——"

"And I put a shot through th' bottom o' their boats afore I left," exclaimed Corby modestly.

"And I," cried Simons, "cut all th' lanyards o' th' riggin'."

"Ho! ho! Ha! ha!" McDonald rolled over the wheel-box in paroxysms of laughter. "What a mess for sure! I'll hev that yarn published from Cape Town to Labrador—Captain Barney Olsen an' his sealskins, or a skin game at Deception Island!" Becoming serious again, he said: "Well, boys, give her all she'll carry—we ain't out o' th' bush yet. With sich a crowd aboard, he'll be after us hotfoot, an' ef he kin catch us, we'll see th' lid o' Davy Jones's locker openin' for us. Now, that beggar'll figure out that we'll swing her off for Cape Town an' land th' catch there, but, I know a company in Monte Video that'll buy our cargo, so I reckon we'd better shape for there. What d'ye say, Simons? Monte Video an' home?"

"Monte Video an' home it is!"

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V

THIRTY-FIVE days later, a rusty, sea-worn schooner let go her mud-hook in the Inner Anchorage at Monte Video, and McDonald and Simons went ashore. A sale was made and each man pocketed a draft for a handsome amount. Simons and McDonald drew some thirty thousand dollars each out of the adventure, while the men were highly satisfied with a trifle over four thousand apiece. They stayed but a short time in the South American city—long enough to procure fresh water and provisions—and early one morning a small fishing schooner, manned by a crew of wealthy men, stole across the turbid waters of the Rio de la Plata on the long trail for home.

Needless to say, Anchorville gossip was busy. The *Roberta S.* had been reported as arriving at Monte Video and diligent inquiry had failed to solve the mystery. When the report came from the lighthouse at the entrance to Anchorville Bay that the *Roberta* was passing in, the town flocked to the wharf. Shabby, rusty and scarred with the winds, seas and suns of the waters in which she had sojourned, she rounded slowly up to the wharf with Bartley Simons to the wheel.

Scarcely had the lines been slipped over the bollards, when the little vessel was invaded by all Anchorville and questions flew thick and fast. In answer to excited inquiries Simons with an enigmatical smile remarked that he was engaged "in a skin game at Deception Island!" and with this, the Anchorville gossip had to be satisfied. Simons had retrieved his ill-luck; his crew were discussing investments in farms and schooners, while McDonald of the flamboyant hair was going home to the old folks, with money to burn.

THE MARTYRED BURRO

By

PETER B. KYNE

I REPEAT the tale as 'twas told to me by the Prince of Liars. There is no reason why it should be repeated, and I offer it without apology because it amused me for an hour one day at Palm Springs. Palm Springs, as the name will signify, is a mixture of palms and sweet water, the two forming a charming little oasis of about half an acre in the Salton Sea Desert, which lies in the center of Riverside County, California, in much the same condition as when the Lord made it. I met the Prince of Liars at Palm Springs.

He was a tall man without much juice in him—a sublimated product of the waste places—though subsequently I discovered that he chewed tobacco. He was a sorrel

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man with invisible eyebrows, one of them cocked about a quarter of an inch above the other, which gave to his countenance an expression of amiable, bird-like curiosity. He wore some clothes and a blue-barreled gun in an open holster, and he gazed with the fond eye of proprietorship and faith on a dejected gray burro, loaded with the stock in trade of a prospector. The burro was drinking from the basin which holds the overflow from Palm Springs, and disputed with me the approach to a tin cup that hangs on the rear wall of the station.

"Give him a kick," commanded the sorrel man.

Being new to the country, I glanced at the speaker in some trepidation, wondering whether his remark had been directed at me or the burro. He settled the question by coming over and kicking the burro in the belly—so I knew he meant to be friendly, and thanked him.

"A burro's got to be taught his place or there ain't no livin' with him," said the sorrel man. His voice was soft and drawly, and when he addressed me in the next breath as "neighbor," I felt irresistibly attracted toward him. When a stranger calls you "neighbor" in the desert you overlook the paradox. Perhaps, if I hadn't been wearing a straw hat and a Summer suit, he might have called me "pardner." But no matter. My train was stalled at Palm Springs—a hot-box, necessitating a new brass, and hence an hour to waste. So I sat down on the green grass under the palms and looked out at the aching desolation around us. Also I gave the desert wanderer a cigar and a dose of the preparation which is popularly supposed to counteract the bite of the seductive little side-winder; whereupon he talked.

It appeared that he had held speech with no man for five months, for he had but a few minutes previously shuffled in from the desert to the shadow of the palms, and he was greedy for conversation. So I remarked that apparently we had arrived at Palm Springs contemporaneously from diverse sections of the terrestrial sphere, and opined that he had been up in the San Jacintos prospecting.

"Yes," he remarked a trifle sadly, "I been out hunting for the nebular hypothosis, and when I find it I'm going to open a skating-rink in Death Valley."

He sat on his heels, Indian fashion, and smoked for two minutes in silence. The passion for speech with human kind was too great to be resisted, however, and as I was thoroughly squelched, it devolved upon him to reopen the conversation.

"That dog-gone burro's beginning to show signs of his late association with evil companions. I reckon if that little jackus had kept company with that General Jackson burro of Wash Hedrick's a week longer he'd have imbibed all the information necessary to render him worthless. As matters stand, he's just innocent enough to be respectable, which General Jackson was not. —No, General Jackson wasn't no live stock of mine, and after what he went and done at the finish there ain't no real call for me to go to abusing his memory. He was owned by Wash Hedrick, and me and Wash was pardners hiking around in Death Valley. We'd come in by Pahrump and each of us had one burro. My animal was just the plain, unassumin' little creature that stands before you now, but this General Jackson burro of Wash Hedrick's was the tail end of hell and damnation. To look at General Jackson you'd never suspect that he'd balk and steal and play you false at every turn of the trail. Early in life he used to kick, but Wash manged to take that festive spirit out of him with a pick-handle, but the process left him cross-grained and contrary.

"Wash Hedrick was just as mean and contrairy in some things as General Jackson, and the contrairiest thing he ever done was to maintain and support this General Jackson burro, year in and year out. Before ever we started out, me knowing Wash's critter well, I begged Wash to kill him and invest in a new pack-animal, but he wouldn't hear to it at all. Wash allowed that General Jackson was about the finest burro that ever backed out of a pack. 'He's got the keenest nose for water you ever see,' says Wash, 'and any time General Jackson can't find a water-hole, you can just make up your mind to die, because there ain't no water-hole. Of course he's got his little peculiarities,' says Wash; 'what critter that lives in the desert ain't?'

"DID you ever meet up with Wash Hedrick? Too bad! Peculiar man, but not a bad chap away low down. Heart like a woman and a brain like an astronomer. He had more ideas for making money than General Jackson could tote

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around on his back. He was a scheming man, was Wash, and when he got a notion in his head it just naturally had to work out. He'd got a notion in his head about General Jackson, and all the misery that critter used to create couldn't offset the love that Wash had for him, all on account of General Jackson having nosed out a water-hole once when Wash was lost and figuring on leaving his bones on the desert.

"Just to show you the mind of this Wash Hedrick, he took a notion once that there was money in raising skunks for their pelts. So he nosed around until he found an old she-skunk with pups. He killed the old woman and took the pups home—they wasn't more'n two weeks old—and performs a surgical operation on them, whereby he eliminates their scent-bags, sews 'em up and turns 'em loose in a little corral he makes special for skunk farming.

"Well, sir, them skunks grew up fine and healthy, and every little while Wash would add to the colony, and by the end of two years he had forty-odd full-grown skunks, slick as mice and the greatest pets in the world. Them skunks was terrible fond of Wash, and of course, owing to this surgical operation, they was as harmless as so many chipmunks. Wash was figuring on about four dollars a pelt on the whole crop.

"One morning he makes all ready for the harvest, and when he goes out into the yard the skunks all come a-running to meet him. They swarms all around Wash's feet, poking up their little noses to be petted, and just a-smothering every step he'd take. Somehow Wash wasn't feeling none too good this particular morning, and the skunks crowding around him and mixing up with his movements that way got on his nerves, and he fetches the biggest skunk in the herd a rattling kick that lands him six feet away. If he'd left that particular skunk alone he might have been worth thousands of dollars in skunk money right now, instead of——"

"What happened?" I interrupted, anxious to get to the meat of the story."

"Wash kicked the wrong skunk. Seems like he was a stray that'd wandered down from the hills and mixed in with Wash's pets, and the way he lit into Wash was something terrible. He just naturally ruined the crop, it all being crowded around Wash Hedrick and in the line of fire, and as for Wash, he had to go out and bury himself. His missus wouldn't let him anear the house, and it broke him all up and sorter soured his spirit until he got interested in developing a short breed of cats."

At this juncture I interrupted long enough to suggest that the train might start at any moment, and reminded the wanderer that he had started out to tell me a story about General Jackson. He looked at me and it was plain that he heard me, but nevertheless he went on with his story.

"Didn't you ever hear of them short cats? I suppose so. Comes of living in big cities where nothing of interest to science ever happens. Well, about these here cats. Like most poor men Wash Hedrick owned a couple of dozen cats and a pack of varmint dogs. The cats used to live under the barn, which was whitewashed clear down to the ground, with a round hole in one of the bottom boards that Wash had bored for the cats to get through when the dogs was a-chasing them. On nice days these cats used to lay up agin the sunny side of the haystack, watching for mice. The minute one of them was spotted by a varmint dog, however, he'd have to leave off looking for mice and streak it to the hole under the barn. If he got there first he was safe, because the dog was too big to follow in.

"Wash had been looking on and enjoying these little frolics between cat and dog for a number of years, when one day he gets an idea in his head and he takes and locks all the dogs up but one. This animal he ties to a long rope, so he can control the critter's actions when necessary. Then he rips out the bottom board with the hole in it, and puts in a new board, whitewashed just like the old one, only instead of cutting a hole for the cats Wash goes to work and paints an imitation of the hole.

"What happened? Why, the minute Wash leads the dog around the corner of the haystack and starts up a cat on a lope for the hole, that cat is in too much of a hurry and too long the victim of habit to notice the deception. So naturally he butts up against that painted hole with all the force of his nature and plumb telescopes himself.

"Is he killed? Of course not. A cat has nine lives, and Wash Hedrick knew that, so he only let each cat telescope himself eight times, and then he puts that cat away in a separate little pen and lets him recover from the shock. Bimeby them deluded cats has kittens, and naturally, when both parents spends their time brooding over their troub-

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les with that painted hole it has a sort of a prenatal effect on the kittens, and I'll be ding-swizzled if they wasn't born half-lengths!

"BUT to get back to the subject of me and Wash Hedrick and General Jackson prospecting in Death Valley. I merely mention these matters to show you what a peculiar man Wash Hedrick was. It goes to show—sorter explains his tenacity for an idea once it makes camp in his head, and excuses him for acting the way he did about General Jackson. He was a man that was never licked in his life by man or burro. Got everlastingly lambasted once by a pet ram, however——"

I raised both hands appealingly, but the desert wanderer took a firmer grip on his cigar and went right on with his story:

"Seems as if Wash had trained this here pet ram to be a prize butter. He was a sour, cross-grained old ram, but he set a heap of store by Wash Hedrick, and though he did try to include Wash in his list of enemies early in life, Wash sorter succeeded in changing his mind and winning him over. But this here ram held a grudge agin women that nothing on earth could cure. Anything in petticoats had to run from Wash Hedrick's ram, or be rammed and batted and butted all over his south pasture.

"Well, sir, one day Wash made up his mind that he wasn't going to have no lawsuits on his hands on account of the neighbors' womenfolks being injured by his pet ram, so he elects to fool this ram and give him a lesson in chivalry. So Wash climbs into a wrapper belonging to his old woman, puts a sunbonnet over his head and a hickory club under his skirts, and goes out into the pasture to open school with the ram.

"Seems as if that dog-gone ram seen Wash first, however, which is most pleasing to a ram, and he gets in the first rap at Wash. Down goes Wash in a heap, with the old ram just a-buttin' and a-buttin' until he's knocked Wash clear acrost the field and rolls him under the bottom rail of the fence where he can't get at him no more.

"When Wash come to he was the maddest man in California. He just lies there a-blinkin' and a-groanin', with the ram on the other side of the fence a-darin' him to come over and make good, and all the time Wash was a-schemin' out a scheme to make that cussed ram leave womenfolks alone. Wash allowed he wasn't going to be put on by no sheep, so bimeby he gets on his feet and limps home around the outside of the line fence.

"The first thing Wash Hedrick done when he got to the barn was to hunt up a big, heavy oak maul about six inches in diameter. Wash dresses up this oak maul in women's clothes, crowns it with the sunbonnet and hangs it by the handle to the limb of a tree. The dummy swings nice and loose, with the maul part, concealed by the wrapper, just swingin' far enough from the ground to connect with the forehead of that ram. Then Wash clumb up the tree and waited.

"Pretty soon that fool ram comes by, spots the lady swinging from the limb of the tree, lowers his head and comes at the dummy like a bat out of ——. *Biff!* Wash told me he hit it a crack you could hear clear over in San Bernardino County. Of course the maul swung out under the blow, and then swung back and banged the ram in the head, a real smart rap. Of course that only made the ram mad, and he butted the dummy again, harder than ever. And each time the maul swung back and rapped him, and the more he was rapped the wilder that ram got. He was a good deal like Wash Hedrick—when he made up his mind to do a thing, he done it.

"So he made a day of it, hammering away until he killed himself. Yes, sir. When Wash Hedrick clumb down out of that tree and started to look for his ram, he found that the critter had just naturally butted himself away on that maul until there wasn't a thing left but his tail.

"The untimely removal of that pet ram affected Wash Hedrick so that he took General Jackson and 'lowed he'd go out on a prospectin' trip for six months and forget his grief. Up near Pahrump he met me going into Death Valley and we become pardners.

"Well, sir, from the very first day we come together, me and Wash was good friends. There wasn't a thing we disagreed on except this General Jackson burro of his, and it would sure have taken a patient man to see virtue in General Jackson. I can't abide a jackus that'll lay down with the pack and try to roll over, or run away across the desert and scatter six months' grub to the coyotes. You bet we never trusted General Jackson with the water. I

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packed the water—we carried it in two little kegs—on my burro, and he never betrayed the confidence we reposed in him.

"However, we managed to get along without falling out over the critter until one day we were coming down a trail along toward the foot of the Funeral Mountains. It'd been a mighty hard day and a long stretch between water-holes, and we was none of us feeling extra cheerful. We had about a quart of water left between us, and the burros hadn't had a drop all day long, but that wasn't no reason as I could see why General Jackson had to go and balk away up on a narrow trail, with the mountain sloping away at ninety degrees three hundred feet down into a dry gully. But balk he did, and there he stuck, me shoving at him from behind and Wash hauling on him in front. He just stuck there, bawling and hee-hawing with rage, and the minute we let go to get our breath for a fresh struggle, what does this General Jackson do but let out one final, mournful bray and jump clear off the mountain!

"I was too tired to yell 'Hooray!' or I'd 'a' done it. Me and Wash run to the edge and watched General Jackson, with all our grub on his miserable back, rolling over and over down the side of the mountain.

"'He'll be dead when we hit the canyon,' I says to Wash, 'and that's some comfort.'

"'But he'll grind all our grub into the dirt and scatter it to glory,' says Wash, 'and that ain't no comfort! I don't feel none like picking up beans one at a time on the side of the Funeral Mountains, because that ain't exactly my notion of enjoyment.'

"PRETTY soon General Jackson hit the bottom of the canyon and lay there on the broad of his back with the pack under him and his feet in the air. Me and Wash climbed down the mountain, and on the way down Wash found half a sack of flour and I picked up a can of baking-powder with the top still on it, so things wasn't quite so bad as they might have been. Wash run up to General Jackson and grabbed him by his off legs and threw him over on his side, trying to get at the pack.

While he was throwing off the diamond hitch, General Jackson sighs out loud, stood up, gave two flips of his hind legs and rid himself of the pack, after which he bows his head meek and deceitful and looks at Wash with his lower lip trembling. He was skinned up a whole lot, but no bones broke, and Wash goes up and rubs him between the ears and calls him a poor abused critter. I didn't have nothing to say. He wasn't my burro, and besides there's times when silence is golden. So I says to Wash, very patient like:

"'Wash, whatever do you suppose made General Jackson jump off the side of the mountain?'

"'There must be a water-hole somewhere in the neighborhood,' says Wash. 'When General Jackson acts that way it's a sure sign.'

"Well, we cast around and searched the canyon, but there wasn't any water, and as the sun was setting, we concluded to cook supper and push on after dark. We had to make a water-hole before sunup or sit back from the game.

"Wash went up and drove my burro down to camp while I built a fire and used up half of our water making a batch of flapjacks. I had supper ready in about fifteen minutes and set the pan of flapjacks on the coals to keep 'em warm while I went over to the foot of the slope, picking up a few cans of grub that was scattered around. And when I came back, there was that General Jackson burro standing over the camp-fire with the last of the flapjacks just disappearing down his throat!

"There's such a thing as driving a mild man to desperation, and when a no-account jackus eats the last flapjack in a dry camp something's got to be done. So I grabs a rock and soaks General Jackson between the eyes, and next thing I knew I'd pulled my six-shooter and taken a shot at him. I notched one of his ears with the first shot and was just stepping around to draw a bead between his eyes and rid the earth of him, when Wash Hedrick pulls down on me and lifts my sombrero off at the first shot.

"'You'll kill my General Jackson burro, will you, you dad-gasted chuckwalla?' says Wash, and if it wasn't for a dollar watch in my shirt pocket he'd 'a' got me cold with the second shot.

"I didn't linger none. I just naturally jumped three feet in the air, and his third shot hit the ground where I'd 'a' been standing if I hadn't been jumping. In about a split second I was down behind a rock, shooting back, and when our guns was empty Wash was down behind another rock re-

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loading his gun, while General Jackson looks on, surprised and contemplative.

"There was a big black and blue spot on my left breast and a million pieces of watch in my pocket from that second shot of Wash's, and in consequence I was a bit put out and in no mood to discuss the matter like a gentleman. I reloaded, and for the matter of ten minutes me and Wash Hedrick lays behind our respective rocks, crackin' away at each other every time a head or an arm or a leg showed.

"Finally our rage begun to abate, and I see that what we was up to was plumb foolish. So I hollers acrost to Wash and makes overtures for peace, because I wouldn't have felt nice if I'd 'a' killed the durned chump.

"'Wash Hedrick,' says I, 'you're a born fool.'

"Oh, am I?" says Wash, very sweetly, and burns a streak across my right forearm. Of course that starts hostilities again, and for another ten minutes we bang away at each other. Then I got back my Christian sperrit for the second time, and I yells over to Wash:

"'Wash, I'll quit shootin' if you will.'

"'How'm I to know you'll keep your word, you measly side-winder?' says Wash.

"'I'll count three, and when I say "Three" we'll both chuck our guns out into the open,' says I.

"'Fair enough,' says Wash. 'Count away.'

"So I counted: 'One—Two—Three—' and at the 'Three,' I waited just a fraction of a second for Wash to chuck out his gun, me being a wee mite distrustful of him taking me at a disadvantage. It seems Wash must have been thinkin' the same thing of me, and as a result nobody's gun come out."

"'You're a horned toad!' says Wash Hedrick, and bangs away at me again.

"'You're a skunk-raisin', burro-lovin' thief!' says I, and replied in kind. We was both good and mad by this time and banging away very reckless. The result was that I put a forty-four through Wash Hedrick's left arm and he lifted the hammer off my gun a second later, and the war was over.

"'Let's count three,' says Wash, 'and the man that don't throw away his gun is a horse thief an'll steal sheep. One—two—three'—and at the word I threw out my gun. It wasn't no use to me nohow. Wash chucked out his gun a second later, and then come out himself with his arm covered with blood. I went up to him and looked at his wound, and was mighty relieved to find that I'd only pinked him. So we used the rest of the water to wash up the wound and I tore up my shirt for a bandage. Nobody said nothing. We was both feeling too ashamed for that. Wash went out and picked up his gun, and I picked up the wreck of mine and we stood looking at each other.

"'I've lost a deal of blood,' says Wash, 'and I ain't feelin' none too strong if anybody was to drive up in a hack and ask you about it. What's the program?'

"'It's thirty miles to the Furnace Creek ranch,' says I. 'I'll put all the camp kit on my burro and you climb up and ride General Jackson. We'll get to water that way—maybe."

"SO WASH HEDRICK mounted General Jackson, and when the moon rose we set out across the desert for Furnace Creek ranch. We pushed along as fast as we could, but when it come sunup we wasn't mor'n half-way, and there wasn't much tuck left in any of us. General Jackson was so weak he was swayin' with Wash Hedrick on his back, and Wash was so weak he was sprawled out on General Jackson's neck with his eyes closed. And there was four buzzards kept a-follerin' us all morning until General Jackson threw up the sponge and stopped dead in his tracks.

"I pushed and I pulled and I coaxed and pleaded with him, but he stuck hard and fast, lookin' at me with blood in his eye. I could see that he had one of his balky spells coming on, and pretty soon he let out a bray, bucked Wash Hedrick off over his head and then turned right around and sat down on Wash Hedrick, with his fore feet out in front of him, as much as to say: 'I've stood this here as long as I'm a-goin' to stand it, and now what are you goin' to do about it?'"

"'Pull the critter off,' says Wash, very faint from under General Jackson's hind quarters; 'he's hurtin' my sore arm.'

"I grabbed General Jackson by the tail and with all the strength I had left I yanked him off Wash.

"'Too much is plenty,' says Wash Hedrick, 'and enough is always sufficient. I've stood everything from this animal except this insult, and even if I'm going to be dead

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before nightfall, I don't aim to allow no jackus to sit on my sore arm,' and with that Wash Hedrick staggers around and puts his gun in General Jackson's ear.

"Well, that was the finish of General Jackson. Wash stood lookin' at him a minute, and then he sat down on the carcass to think over the philosophy of life. While he was a-settin' there, we hears two or three joyful croaks overhead, and there was them four buzzards circling round and round with their eyes on General Jackson. Wash Hedrick busted out crying.

"'Dad rot my miserable soul!' he sobs; 'I've gone to work and murdered the best little burro in Death Valley—one of the kindest, most affectionate little critters a man ever owned, and now I'm a-leavin' him here to be et up by turkey-buzzards!'

"'Well, Wash,' says I, 'I don't exactly know how low a turkey-buzzard will descend——'

"'Don't you go to aspersin' the character of that little dead critter!' says Wash, mighty ugly. 'If it hadn't been for you a-lightin' into him in the first place, he'd be alive and well this minute.'

"'Wash Hedrick,' says I, 'don't you go to getting personal over the late lamented and a-takin' advantage of me just because you got a crippled arm. Get up off that defunct piece of deviltry and climb aboard my burro. Me and you are dead men if we don't reach water by sunset. I'm surprised,' says I, very sarcastic, 'that you don't ask me to bury the beast so the buzzards can't get at him.'

"'That ain't such a bad idea,' says Wash very quiet, and in less time than it takes to tell it, I'm looking down the barrel of his gun. 'You've harassed and bantered General Jackson ever since I met up with you at Pahrump, and by the gods of war, I'm going to take you at your word and make you bury him! Take hold of your shovel, you prairie dog, and get busy, or I'll make buzzard meat out of you!'

"Well, sir, there was a wild look like fever in Wash Hedrick's eye, but his hand was too steady to take chances, and besides I realized that his sufferings had driven him crazy. So I gets my shovel out and falls to scooping out a grave for General Jackson, and when I'd dug down about four feet, Wash standing over me all the time, I happened to look up from the job, and there was Wash Hedrick laid out in a dead faint alongside General Jackson.

"I clumb out of the hole and helped myself to Wash's gun and made up my mind that I'd have to bury them both together. Then I concluded that perhaps I could make Furnace Creek ranch by myself and maybe get back in time to save Wash, provided I could only drag him into some kind of shade. So I concluded to lay him down in the hole I'd dug for General Jackson, because I knew that even if he did go delirious he couldn't possibly climb out and wander away and get lost. So I laid him in the grave and made a little canvas shelter over him with the pack coverings to keep the sun off, and struck out for Furnace Creek.

"I GOT there that night about ten o'clock, crawling on my hands and knees and crazy as a roadrunner. Along toward morning I was feeling pretty strong again, so I borrowed a horse at the ranch and with a big canteen on my saddle I rode out to see if I would be in time to save Wash Hedrick.

I marked down the spot where I'd left him miles before I come to it, owing to the buzzards, and when I rode up, there sat Wash Hedrick, looking as fresh as early tomatoes.

"'Hello, Wash,' says I; 'somebody pass by and give you a drink?'

But Wash busted out crying again, and pointed to the grave, and I'm the biggest liar in Riverside County right now, if it wasn't half full of the loveliest, dirty black water you ever saw!

"And then I understood, and I felt sorry for General Jackson and Wash Hedrick. The old General had got a hunch that there was water somewhere in the immediate neighborhood, and that was why he balked and refused to go on. Once in a while the sandstorms cover the water-holes, and—well, anyhow, General Jackson was a martyr to his own common sense, and me and Wash Hedrick was a pair of fools."

"'What became of Wash Hedrick?' I asked when the story was finished.

"'The death of General Jackson soured his spirit so that he quit prospecting, and the last I heard of him he was figuring on making a fortune distilling vinegar from cactus plants."

And just then the conductor yelled "All aboard!" and I said good-by to the Prince of Liars.

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W. MAYES—THE AMAZING

By TALBOT MUNDY

HE IS just plain William Mayes, without a handle to his name, and yet he has made more than his share of history, he has earned and received more than the average man's meed of praise, he has helped as much as any living man to peg down the border stakes of the British Empire, and he might have been a V. C. man and a High Commissioner!

Fancy a man turning down the offer of a Victoria Cross and accepting a hundred pounds in its stead! Mayes did it. Fancy a man facing five thousand armed savages, alone and unarmed at night, and then losing his job for misconduct! Mayes did it. Fancy a man going back to England in disgrace, unknown at home and penniless, and being sent back on the next boat by the Home Government as too good a man to lose! Mayes again! He is the most amazing man in all East Africa!

He began by being a sailor and worked his way up to the command of a sailing ship trading on the East Coast of Africa. He was chosen for that post because of his indubitable courage and his not too insistent squeamishness, but he happened one day to run his ship ashore and lose her, and the fact that his ticket was canceled by the Board of Trade suggests that the wreck may not have been unavoidable. And a man could do a whole lot of things in those days in East African waters without falling foul of the Board of Trade.

After that he went to the Seychelles Islands and married a woman of the country —not after the custom of the country, but properly, in church. She was a French half-breed, quite well educated and very charming, and she was the only living thing that Mayes ever feared. He loved her, as he has loved nothing else in life; he quarreled with her almost incessantly and sneered at her dark blood, but thrashed any one, even his superior officers, who dared to slight her even indirectly.

When he lost his job he left her behind him to care for herself in Africa, and when he was sent back to East Africa again they fell into each other's arms, and she went with him to his new post up the Tana River. And the banks of the Tana River are not exactly God's Country.

In the days when Mayes was on his honeymoon East Africa was being run by the East Africa Chartered Company; it was modeled on the lines of the old East India Company and was in some respects not unlike the Chartered Company of Rhodesia of the present day. It was purely commercial, but in return for its practical monopoly of trade it had to provide magistrates and various other officials and a small standing army for the proper government and policing of the country.

Mayes came over from the Seychelles and was given a position as trader on the Company's staff, and for the next few years he was employed in leading caravans from Mombasa on their thousand-mile march into the interior of Uganda. He was resting in Uganda after one of his exhausting journeys when the Uganda Mutiny broke out.

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The Uganda Mutiny is really a story, and a thrilling one, in itself. The rebelling troops were all Sudanese—Mohammedans to a man—and many of them had formerly been members of the Mahdi's army that was beaten at Omdurman; after the battle they bolted into the interior, and numbers of them enlisted in the Uganda Rifles. They were first-class fighting men, well armed, well trained and highly intelligent, and had they been treated properly they would no doubt still be on the strength of the British army. The trouble was, though, that they were not paid.

It was no easy matter in those days to convey money on the heads of porters through hundreds of miles of hostile country; the risk of losing it on the way, the fact that nearly all trade in Uganda used to be carried on by barter, and damnable stupidity on the part of somebody at home were the three chief reasons for not paying the men in coin. Their pay was eighteen months in arrears when their patience finally gave out and they decided to form a Mohammedan empire of their own in Central Africa. They are not altogether to be blamed for the massacres and pillaging that followed, and the Home Government took that view of it; some were hanged or shot, but many of them are still in Government service.

"THEY'LL FIND US HERE WHEN THEY COME!"

MAYES was at Jinja when the mutiny broke out, with half a dozen other white men, his wife, and a handful of Sudanese soldiers. Native soldiers are always loyal when Mayes has the handling of them, and there was not even a murmur of disloyalty among his contingent. Jinja is close to the Ripon Falls, where the headwaters of the Nile flow out of Lake Victoria Nyanza; it is on the boundary-line between East Africa and Uganda, and there the Company always kept a big store of trade goods, ammunition and provisions. The place was a plum waiting for the mutineers, and the problem was to prevent them from getting it.

The other white men were for burning the place and retreating to East Africa. Mayes said, "No," and he has a way of saying "No" that carries weight. They pointed out to him that it would take two months at least for news of the mutiny to reach England, and at the very least four months more—six probably—before troops could reach them from India.

"They'll find us here when they come!" said Mayes.

And without any further argument he set his men to throwing up earthworks to protect the place. He hoisted the British flag, climbed up the flag-pole, and nailed it to the top with his own hands; then he cut away the halyards and went back to superintend the digging. His action was all the more remarkable in that he was a long way from being the superior officer in Jinja; five of the seven men present were senior to him in the company's service.

The mutineers advanced on Jinja without waste of time, and they arrived there before the earthworks were finished. There was a big gap on the east side of the hastily constructed fort through which they could have marched twenty abreast. Mayes's men were toiling to fill it, but a hot fire from the mutineers rattled them, and the few men that Mayes could spare to return the volleys produced little or no effect on the enemy. It was a case for desperate measures, and Mayes took them.

There was an ant-hill some six feet high between the gap and the mutineers' position; it was about a hundred yards from the gap, and possibly two hundred yards from the enemy. Mayes walked out coolly and sat on it; once there he produced his cigarette-case, took out a cigarette and lit it with a hand that was as steady as fate. Then he started to abuse the mutineers.

He called them traitors and cowards and women; he knew their language perfectly, and he used every vile and misbegotten adjective embodied in it to describe their parentage, habits, morals, character, religion and reputation, until they got so madly angry that they concentrated their fire on him—mind you, at two hundred yards!

Natives of Africa are invariably rotten shots; you can teach them almost anything except the art of shooting, and though they nearly shot the coat from his back, pierced his helmet in a dozen places, and shot the sole off one of his boots, they failed to hit him at all badly. There was blood running from his cheek and one arm, but he still lit cigarette after cigarette, and still thought out pointed, pungent Arabic abuse to hurl at them, and, the more savage they became, the wilder were their shots!

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They decided at last to rush him; but the moment they broke cover the spade-men picked up their rifles and, aided by the six white men on the ramparts, poured in a few withering volleys that drove them back again. So they lay down again and sniped at him; and he sat still there, and smoked his cigarettes, and jeered at them, and drew their fire away from the workers, until the earthwork was finished and the fort was tenable.

Then he walked back to the fort as calmly as he had walked out of it, and took command of the whole garrison inside it. When the Sikh regiments arrived from India, about five months later, they found him there, with the flag still flying up above him, as he had said they would.

When the mutiny was over he was offered a V. C. for his bravery. A small pension goes with the V. C., and a man who has it can get very nearly any job he wants in reason; people will make jobs for him if there are none going, because the mere fact that he can lose his V. C. for misconduct makes him dependable.

But Mayes could never see very far beyond his nose where his own interests were concerned; he replied that he would prefer cold coin to any kind of jewelry, so they took him at his word, and gave him one hundred pounds! Less than five hundred dollars! He considered that he had been well paid!

THE WHITE RULER OF THE NANDI

THE British Government took over East Africa and Uganda after that, canceling the Company's charter; most of the Company officers were taken over, and among them was Mayes. He was given a position as assistant collector on a salary of one thousand dollars a year, and he has never risen above that rank during all the years that have followed, although he has governed the whole of the Nandi country single-handed and has done the work of a Commissioner at least—and done it well. The Government has never dared promote him.

Under the new arrangement there were two separate governments under two Commissioners, one for East Africa and one for Uganda. Mayes was at first stationed in Uganda, and he did yeoman work there, cleaning up after the mutiny and enforcing the Pax Britannica; but there was no real fighting to be done, and little danger. Those two things are meat and drink to him, and for the lack of them he began getting out of hand. Things finally became so unpleasant for every one concerned that at last he was transferred to the East Africa Protectorate Government and told to behave himself. For a while he did.

He was stationed at Kisumu for a year or two, and helped to build it. It was he who quelled the Kavirondo rising—smashed the Wanyoro—and led the expedition into Kisi country that forced the turbulent inhabitants of that part of the world to accept British rule for good and all. No man ever lived who understood the art of handling natives better than Mayes, and before long the Commissioner sent him up to Nandi, to see whether he could not succeed where, up to then, everybody else had failed signally.

The Masai have an unearned reputation of being the fiercest and most "difficult" tribe in Africa; as a matter of fact the Nandi can give them points and a beating in every single particular. The Nandi are decent blacks—quick to take offense, but truthful, brave and naturally independent. Every time the Masai have tackled them—and that has been happening since long before even the Arabs ever heard of Africa—the Masai have had the worst of the fighting, and until recent times—since Mayes left their country, in fact—even the British Government has been obliged to handle the Nandi with a velvet glove.

They have been smashed recently, and there is no prospect of their ever reasserting their independence; but when Mayes went up there, with twenty-five Kavirondo police to back him up, they were a thorn in the side of the Commissioner, and a constant menace.

The first thing Mayes did was to learn their language; languages come naturally to him; he can even pronounce them like a native; he can think in native languages, and has an instinct for seeing things, when he wants to, from the native point of view. It took him about six weeks to become conversant with it, and another six to speak it almost perfectly; then he sent back his policemen and his wife and ran the country single-handed.

The house he had to live in was a grass-roofed hut; the only symbol of authority he retained was a flag-pole with the British flag waving at the top of it; he wore an old khaki suit with leather buttons, and lived

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on what he could shoot and what the natives brought him. He looked more like a beach-comber than a British officer, but from the time he got there there was only one man who counted in the Nandi country, and that man was William Mayes.

He mixed with them, talked to them, laughed with them—and at them. When night-time came he sat beside their camp-fires and told them stories; and when the *elmorans*—that is to say, the younger fighting men—grew truculent, he used his fist—the big freckled, hairy fist that his crew had dreaded in the coastwise sailing days. He used that fist of his a little bit too much at times, or at all events they thought so.

There was a Witch Doctor who had too much influence around the countryside for Mayes's peace of mind, and he went to see that Witch Doctor and had a talk with him. He threatened to break the Witch Doctor's head for him unless he went out of business immediately, and the native shook his spear at him and laughed in his face and dared him to try anything of the kind. So Mayes waded in, and the Witch Doctor groaned in his hut for the next ten days or so.

But Witch Doctors are men of influence in Africa. They correspond quite closely to the medicine-man of the American Indians, and in many cases their authority is greater than the chief's. This particular man, who had adopted the Swahili name of Maganga Kubwa, was the most important Witch Doctor in the Nandi country. His influence was chiefly among the younger men, and he began stirring up their lust for fighting, and their bestial blood-hunger, the moment he was well enough again.

He had little difficulty; fighting is the Nandi's chief employment, given the opportunity, and he does not consider himself a man until he has dipped his spear in blood. Maganga Kubwa told them tales of war until their blood was up, and then rehearsed the list of grievances—real and imaginary—that the whole tribe had against Mayes.

Before long he had them properly roused, and on the first night of the full moon following the Witch Doctor's hammering at Mayes's hands, all the fighting men in the tribe collected round Maganga Kubwa's hut and tramped down in a body to where Mayes lived. Their plan was to watch the Witch Doctor have his revenge on Mayes and then to swoop down on Kisumu and the other stations on the line and butcher every white man to the westward of Nairobi. But their gentle little plan miscarried, thanks to Mayes.

ONE AGAINST FIVE THOUSAND

THERE was a native woman—the wife of one of the boys who waited on him, and it was part of her duty to tend the enormous log fire that he always kept burning at night in front of his hut, and on the night of the projected murder she came running into the hut to wake him with the news that several thousand native spearmen were outside, headed by Maganga Kubwa, and that Maganga Kubwa wanted him.

"What for?" demanded Mayes.

"He means to kill you!" said the woman. "Run, *bwana*, run! Run round behind the house where the shadows lie, and seek your own people. I will talk to them and keep them waiting for a few minutes; they will kill me then, but you will be gone. Go, *bwana!* Run!"

"Silence!" ordered Mayes. "Get into that corner and stay there!"

The woman slunk into a dark corner of the hut, chattering with fear, and Mayes went to the door and opened it. He stood there in the doorway, clad only in his pajamas, with the moon shining on his great deep hairy chest, and looked around him. He had no weapon with him of any kind.

The natives raised a yell the moment he appeared; five thousand spears flew upward, and five thousand right feet struck the earth in the thundering death sentence. Then there was silence.

"What do you want with me?" demanded Mayes.

"Your life!" said Maganga Kubwa, stepping toward him with spear uplifted.

There was a moment of suspense while Mayes stood stock-still in the doorway, arms akimbo, silent and defiant; then the spear flashed downward, glittering in the firelight. Mayes stepped aside and the spear missed him. The next second he closed; there was a struggle, the sound of cracking ribs as Mayes's arms gripped the native, a scream, like a wounded horse's scream, and the Witch Doctor went headlong into Mayes's camp-fire, while the watching spearmen stood motionless and gasped.

He crawled out, and Mayes picked him up and hurled him in again; he crawled out again, and Mayes seized one burning log

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after another and flung them on top of him; then he made his woman bring a shovel, and he piled the hot embers on him until his screams died down, and there was nothing left to scream—nothing but scorched and stinking flesh!

Then he turned on the waiting spearmen and demanded once again what they wanted. They gazed at him in silent awe for half a minute, and then turned and vanished into the darkness—licked. Mayes went back into the hut and beat the woman for daring to suggest that five thousand natives could make a white man run!

HOME AGAIN, BACK AGAIN

THE Nandi were quiet after that, and Mayes had no more trouble with them; his word was thenceforth law, and he ruled them like a tyrant. It was probably the easy time they gave him, and the lack of excitement, that brought about his downfall. He had made up his mind to leave the Government service and settle down in Nandi country; that, of course, was a perfectly reasonable proposition, but along with the desire to quit came a lack of interest in his duty—and even worse. The Commissioner began hearing tales of Mayes, and in the end removed him.

His trial was held in secret, but the upshot of it was that he left the Government service, presumably for good and all, and went home to England, leaving his wife behind him in East Africa. He spent the few pounds he took home with him, and then besieged the Colonial Office; he actually sat on the front steps and refused to budge until he had spoken to some one in authority, and at last the Under Secretary for the Colonies sent for him and had a talk with him. Mayes asked for a new job on the West Coast.

"No," said the Under Secretary; "you know the East Coast; you're better there."

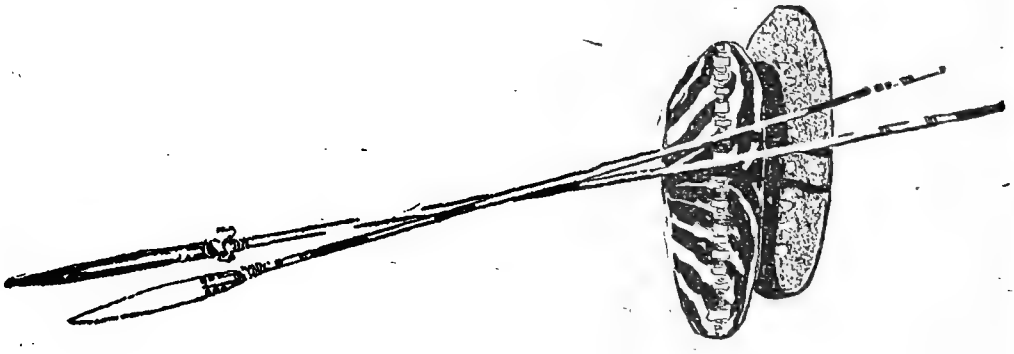
"But I've just had the sack from there!" said Mayes.

"I know you have; and you deserved it! But you're too good a man to lose. Go back on the next steamer. Wait! Here's an order for your passage; it will be deducted from your pay when you get out there. Go out there, and stay there, and don't come back again!"

"Go as what?" said Mayes.

"As what you were before, only I'll see that you get a new district."

So back Mayes went, and there he is now, somewhere up the Tana River, controlling Galla negroes and Somalies and Coast Swahili, running one of the fiercest, wickedest countries, in one of the worst climates on God's green earth; enforcing with his fist the Pax Britannica that more often than not requires an army for its backing. There are few men like Mayes in the world, but what few there are are making history.



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KUT-LE OF THE DESERT

By
HONORÉ WILLSIE

SYNOPSIS:—Rhoda Tuttle, an invalid from the East, visiting Mr. and Mrs. Jack Newman on their ranch in New Mexico, has broken her engagement to John DeWitt on the grounds of her ill health. Charley Cartwell, or Kut-le, an Indian, but a Yale graduate and an engineer on the irrigation project, saves Rhoda from a scorpion-bite. He proposes, but is rejected, her liking for him being unequal to her objection to Indian blood. Kut-le therefore adopts Indian measures and carries her off by force, to win her love and restore her health by shaking her out of partly imaginary invalidism and shattering some of her artificial ideas by contact with Nature and real life. She is treated with the utmost respect, but forced to stand all the hardships of the hurried flight. She drops her scarf as a clue for the pursuing white men.

CHAPTER IX

THE PURSUIT STARTS

AS TWILIGHT deepened, Katherine lay in the hammock thankful for the soothing effect of the darkness on her aching eyes. She felt a little troubled about Kut-le. She was very fond of the young Indian. She understood him as did no one else, perhaps, and had the utmost faith in his honor and loyalty. She suspected that Rhoda had had much to do with the young Indian's sudden departure, and she felt irritated with the girl, though at the same time she acknowledged that Rhoda had done only what she, Katherine had advised—had treated Kut-le as if he had been a white man.

She watched the corral for Rhoda's return, but darkness came and there was no sound of her coming. A little disturbed, she walked to the corral bars and looked down to the lights of the cowboys' quarters. If only John DeWitt and Jack would return! But she did not expect them before midnight. She returned to the house and telephoned to the ranch foreman.

"Don't you worry, ma'am," he answered cheerily. "No harm could come to her. She just strolled till it got dark, and is just starting for home now, I bet! She can't have got out of sight of the ranch lights."

"But she may have! You can't tell what she's done, she's such a tenderfoot," insisted Katherine nervously. "She may have been hurt!

It was well that Katherine could not see the foreman's face during the conversation. It had a decided scowl of apprehension, but he managed a cheerful laugh.

"Well, you *have* got nervous, Mrs. Newman! I'll just send three or four of the boys out to meet her—eh?"

"Oh, yes, do!" cried Katherine. "I shall feel easier. Good-by."

Dick Freeman dropped the receiver and

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hurried into the neighboring bunk-house.

"Boys," he said quietly, "Mrs. Newman just 'phoned me that Miss Tuttle went to walk at sunset to be gone half an hour. She ain't got back yet. She is alone. Will some of you come with me?"

Every hand of cards was dropped before Dick was half through his statement. In less than twenty minutes twenty cowboys were circling slowly out into the desert.

For two hours Katherine paced from the living-room to the veranda, from the veranda to the corral. She changed her light evening gown to her khaki riding-habit. Her nervousness grew to panic. She sent Li Chung to bed, then she paced the lawn, listening, listening.

At last she heard the thud of hoofs, and Dick Freeman dismounted in the light that streamed from the open door.

"We haven't found her, Mrs. Newman. Has Mr. Newman got back? I think we must get up an organized search."

Katherine could feel her heart thump heavily.

"No, he hasn't. Have you found her trail?"

"No, it's awful hard to trail in the dark, and the desert for miles around the ranch is all cut up with hoof-marks anyhow, you know."

Katherine wrung her hands.

"Oh, poor little Rhoda!" she cried. "What shall we do!"

"No harm can come to her," insisted Dick. "She will know enough to sit tight till daylight, then we will have her before the heat gets up."

"Oh, if she only will!" moaned Katherine. "Do whatever you think best, Dick, and I'll send Jack and John DeWitt to you as soon as they return."

Dick swung himself to the saddle again.

"Better go in and read something, Mrs. Newman. You mustn't worry yourself sick until you are sure you have something to worry about."

HOW she passed the rest of the night, Katherine never knew. A little after midnight Jack came in, his face tense and anxious. Katherine paled as she saw his expression. She knew he had met some of the searchers. When Jack saw the color leave his wife's pretty cheeks he kissed her very tenderly and for a moment they clung to each other silently, thinking of the delicate girl adrift on the desert.

"Where is John DeWitt?" asked Katherine, after a moment.

"He's almost crazy. He's with Dick Freeman. Only stopped for a fresh horse."

"They have no trace?" questioned Katherine.

Jack shook his head.

"You know what a proposition it is to hunt for as small an object as a human in the desert. Give me your smelling-salts and the little Navajo blanket. One—one can't tell whether she's hurt or not."

Katherine began to sob as she obeyed:

"You are all angel good not to blame me, but I know it's my fault. I shouldn't have let her go. But she is so sensible, usually."

"Dear heart," said Jack, rolling up the Navajo, "any one that knows dear old Rhoda knows that what she will she will, and you are not to blame. Go to bed and sleep if you can."

"Oh, Jack, I can't! Let me go with you, do!"

But Jack shook his head.

"You aren't strong enough to do any good, and some one must stay here to run things."

So again Katherine was left to pace the veranda. All night the search went on. Jack sent messages to the neighboring ranches, and the following morning fifty men were in the saddle seeking Rhoda's trail. Jack also sent into the Pueblo country for Kut-le, feeling that his aid would be invaluable. It would take some time to get a reply from the Indians and in the mean time the search went on rigorously, with no trace of the trail to be found.

John DeWitt did not return to the ranch until the afternoon after Rhoda's disappearance. Then, disheveled, with bloodshot eyes, cracked lips and blistered face, he dropped exhausted on the veranda steps. Katherine and Jack greeted him with quiet sympathy.

"I came in to get fixed up for a long cruise," said John. "My pony went lame, and I want a flannel shirt instead of this silk thing I had on last night. I wish to God Kut-le would come. I suppose he could read what we are blind to."

"You bet!" cried Jack. "I expect an answer from his friends this afternoon. I just had a telegram from Porter, in answer

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to one I sent him this morning. I caught him at Brown's and he will be here this afternoon. He knows almost as much as an Indian about following a trail."

They all spoke in the hushed tones one employs in the sick-room. Jack tried to persuade DeWitt to eat and sleep, but he refused, his forced calm giving way to a hoarse, "For heaven's sake! can I rest when she is dying out there?"

John had not finished his feverish preparations when Billy Porter stalked into the living-room. As he entered, the telephone rang and Jack answered it. Then he returned to the eager group.

"Kut-le has gone on a long hunt with some of his people. They don't know where he went and refuse to look for him."

Billy Porter gave a hard, mirthless laugh.

"Why, certainly! Jack, you ought to have a hole bored in your head to let in a little light! Kut-le gone. Can't find Rhoda's trail. Kut-le in love with Rhoda. Kut-le an Indian. Rhoda refuses him, he goes off, gets some of his chums, and when he catches Rhoda alone he steals her. He will keep a man behind, covering his trail. Oh, you easy Easterners make me sick!"

The Newmans and DeWitt stood staring at Porter with horror in their eyes. The clock ticked for an instant, then DeWitt gave a groan and bowed his head against the mantelpiece. Katherine ran to him and tried to pull his head to her little shoulder.

"Oh, John, don't! Don't! Maybe Billy is right. I'm afraid he is! But one thing I do know. Rhoda is as safe in Kut-le's hands as she would be in Jack's! I know it, John!"

John did not move, but at Katherine's words the color came back into Jack Newman's face.

"That's right!" he said stoutly. "It's a devilish thing for Kut-le to do. But she's safe, John, old boy, I'm sure she is."

Billy Porter, conscience-stricken at the effect of his words, clapped John on the shoulder.

"Aw, shucks! I let my Injun hate get the best of my tongue. Of course she's safe enough, only the darn devil's got to be caught before he gets to Mexico and makes some padre marry 'em. So it's us to the saddle a whole heap."

"We'd better get an Indian to help trail," said Jack.

"You'll have a sweet time getting an Injun to trail Kut-le!" said Porter. "The Injuns half worship him. They think he's got some kind of strong medicine—you know that. You get one and he'll keep you off the trail instead of on. I can follow the trail as soon as he quits covering it. Get the canteens and come on. We don't need a million cowboys running round promiscuous over the sand. Numbers don't help in trailing an Injun. It's experience and patience. It may take us two weeks, and we'll outfit for that. But we'll get him in the end—Crook always did."

There was that in Billy Porter's voice which put heart into his listeners. John DeWitt lifted his head, and while his blue eyes returned the gaze of the others miserably, he squared his shoulders doggedly.

"I'm ready," he said briefly.

"Oh, let me come!" cried Katherine. "I can't bear this waiting!"

Billy smiled. "Why, Mrs. Jack, you'd be dried up and blowed away before the first day was over!"

"But Rhoda is enduring it!" protested Katherine, with quivering lips.

"God!" John DeWitt muttered and flung himself from the house to the corral. The other two followed him at once.

CHAPTER X

A FLUTTERING BIT OF WHITE

IT WAS mid-afternoon when the three rode into the quivering yellow haze of the desert, followed by a little string of pack-horses. It was now nearing twenty-four hours since Rhoda had disappeared, and in that time there had been little sand blowing. This meant that the trail could be easily followed, were it found. The men rode single file, Billy Porter leading. All wore blue flannel shirts and khaki trousers. John DeWitt rode Eastern park fashion, with short stirrup, rising from the saddle with the trot. Jack and Billy rode Western fashion, long stirrup, an inseparable part of their horses, a fashion that John DeWitt was to be forced to learn in the fearful days to come.

Billy Porter declaimed in a loud voice from the head of the procession.

"Of course Kut-le has taken to the mountains. He'll steer clear of ranches and cowboys for a while. Our chance lies in his giv-

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ing up covering his trail after he gets well into the ranges. We will get his trail and hang on till we can outwit him. If he was alone, we'd never get him, barring accident, but he will be a lot hampered by Miss Rhoda, and I trust to her to hamper him a whole lot after she gets her hand in."

All the rest of the burning afternoon they moved toward the mountains. It was quite dusk when they entered the foothills. The way, not good at best, grew difficult and dangerous to follow. Billy led on, however, until darkness closed down on them in a little cactus-grown canyon. Here he halted and ordered camp for a few hours.

"Heavens!" exclaimed DeWitt. "You're not going to camp! I thought you were really going to do something!"

Billy finished lighting the fire and by its light he gave an impatient glance at the tenderfoot. But the look of the burned, sand-grimed face, the bloodshot eyes blazing with anxiety, caused him to speak patiently:

"Can't kill the horses, DeWitt. You must make up your mind that this is going to be a hard hunt. You got to call out all the strength you've been storing up all your life, and then some. We got to use common sense. I want to get ahead, don't I? I seen Miss Rhoda. I know what she's like. This isn't any joy ride for me, either. I got a lot of feeling in it."

John DeWitt extended his sun-blistered right hand and Billy Porter clasped it with his brown paw.

Jack Newman cleared his throat.

"Did you give your horse enough rope John? There is a good lot of grass close to the canyon wall. Quick as you finish your coffee, old man, roll in your blanket. We will rest till midnight when the moon comes up, eh, Billy?"

DeWitt, finally convinced of the good sense and earnestness of his friends, obeyed. The canyon was still in darkness when Jack shook him into wakefulness, but the mountain peak above was a glorious silver. Camp was broken quickly and in a short time Billy was leading the way up the wretched trail. DeWitt's four hours of sleep had helped him. He could to some degree control the feverish anxiety that was consuming him and he tried to turn his mind from picturing Rhoda's agonies to castigating himself for leaving her unguarded, even though Kut-le had left the ranch.

Before leaving the ranch that afternoon he had telegraphed and written Rhoda's only living relative, her Aunt Mary. He had been thankful, as he wrote, that Rhoda had no mother. He had, in a way, so liked the young Indian; there had been such good feeling between them, that he could not yet believe that Porter's surmise was wholly correct.

"Supposing," he said aloud, "that you are wrong, Porter. Supposing that she's—she's dying of thirst down there in the desert. You have no proof of Kut-le's doing it. It's only founded on your Indian hate, you say yourself."

"That's right," said Newman. "Are you sure we aren't wasting time, Billy?"

Billy turned in the saddle to face them.

"Well, boys," he said, "you've got half the county scratching the desert with a fine-tooth comb. I don't see how we three can help very much there. On the other hand, we might do some good up here. Now I'll make a bargain with you. If by midnight to-night we ain't struck any trace of her, you folks can quit."

"And what will you do?" asked Jack.

"Me?" Billy shrugged his shoulders. "Why, I'll keep on this trail till my legs is wore off above my boots!" and he turned to guide his pony up a little branch trail, at the top of which stood a tent with the telltale windlass and forge close by.

BEFORE the tent they drew rein. In response to Billy's call a rough-bearded fellow lifted the tent flap and stood suppressing a yawn as if visitors to his lonely claim were of daily occurrence.

"Say, friend," said Billy, "do you know Newman's ranch?"

"Sure," returned the prospector.

"Well, this is Mr. Newman. A young lady has been visiting him and his wife. She disappeared night before last. We suspicion that Cartwell, that educated Injun, has stole her. We're trying to find his trail. Can you give us a hunch?"

The sleepy look left the prospector's eyes. He crossed the rocks to put a hand on Billy's pommel.

"Gee! Ain't that ungodly!" he exclaimed. "I ain't seen a soul. But night before last I heard a screaming in my sleep. It woke me up, but when I got out here I couldn't hear a thing. It was faint and far away, and I decided it was a wildcat.

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Do you suppose it was her?"

DeWitt ground his teeth together and his hands shook, but he made no sound. Jack breathed heavily.

"You think it was a woman?" asked Billy hoarsely.

The prospector spoke hesitatingly:

"If I'd been shore, I'd 'a' gone on a hunt. But it was all kind of in my sleep. It was from 'way back up in the mountains there."

"Thanks," said Billy; "we'll be on our way."

"It's four o'clock. Better stop and have some grub with me, then I'll join in and help you."

"No!" cried DeWitt, breaking his silence. "No!"

"That's the young lady's financeer," said Billy, nodding toward John.

"Sho!" said the prospector sympathetically.

Billy lifted his reins:

"Thanks; we'll be getting along, I guess. Just as much obliged to you! We'll water here in your spring."

They moved on in the direction whither the prospector had pointed. They rode in silence. Dawn came slowly, clearly. The peaks lifted magnificently, range after range, against the rosy sky. There was no trail; they followed the possible way. The patient little cow ponies clambered over rocks and slid down inclines of a frightful angle as cleverly as mountain goats. At ten o'clock they stopped for breakfast and a three-hours' sleep. It was some time before DeWitt could be persuaded to lie down, but at last, perceiving that he was keeping the others from their rest, he took his blanket to the edge of the ledge and lay down.

His sleepless eyes roved up and down the adjoining canyon. Far to the south, near the desert floor, he saw a fluttering bit of white. Now a fluttering bit of white, far from human byways, means something! Tenderfoot though he was, DeWitt realized this and sleep left his eyes. He sat erect. For a moment he was tempted to call the others, but he restrained himself. He would let them rest while he kept watch over the little white beacon, for so, unaccountably, it seemed to him. He eyed it hungrily, and then a vague comfort and hopefulness came to him and he fell asleep.

Jack's lusty call to coffee woke him. DeWitt jumped to his feet and with a new light in his eyes he pointed out his discovery. The meal was disposed of very hurriedly and, leaving Jack to watch the camp, John and Billy crossed the canyon southward. After heavy scrambling they reached the foot of the canyon wall. Twenty feet above them dangled a white cloth. Catching any sort of a hand and foot hold, John clambered upward. Then he gave a great shout of joy. Rhoda's scarf with the pebble pinned in one end was in his hands! DeWitt slid to the ground and he and Billy examined the scarf tenderly, eagerly.

"I told you! I told you!" exulted Billy hoarsely. "See that weight fastened to it? Wasn't that smart of her? Bless her heart! Now we got to get above somehow, and find where she dropped it from!"

CHAPTER XI

ENTERING THE DESERT KINDERGARTEN

"WE'LL start now," said Kut-le.

Alchise led out the horses. The squaws each threw an emancipated, sinewy leg across a pony's back and followed Alchise's fluttering shirt up the mountain. Kut-le stood holding the bridle of a sedate little horse on which he had fastened a comfortable high-backed saddle.

"Come, Rhoda," he said; "I'll shorten the stirrups after you are mounted.

Rhoda stood with her back to the wall, her blue-veined hands clutching the rough out-croppings on either side, horror and fear in her eyes.

"I can't ride cross-saddle!" she exclaimed. "I used to be a good horsewoman in the side-saddle. But I'm so weak that even keeping in the side-saddle is out of the question."

"Anything except cross-saddle is utterly out of the question," replied the Indian, "on the sort of trails we have to take. You might as well begin to control your nerves now as later. I'm going to make an expert rider of you by the time you have regained your strength. Come, Rhoda!"

The girl turned her face to the afterglow. Remote and pitiless lay the distant crimson ranges. She shuddered and turned back to the young Indian who stood watching her. For the moment all the agony of her situation was concentrated in horror of another night in the saddle.

"Kut-le, I *can't!*"

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"Shall I pick you up and carry you over here?" asked Kut-le patiently.

In her weakness and misery, Rhoda's cleft chin quivered. But there was only merciless determination in the Indian's face. Slowly the girl walked to his side. He swung her to the saddle, adjusted the stirrups carefully, then fastened her securely to the saddle with a strap about her waist. Rhoda watched him in the silence of utter fear. Having settled the girl to his satisfaction he mounted his own horse and Rhoda's pony followed him docily up the trail.

The trail rose steeply. After the first few dizzy moments, Rhoda, clinging to the saddle with hands and knees, was thankful for the security of her new seat. The scenery was uncanny to her terrorized eyes. To the left were great overhanging walls with cactus growing from every crevice. To the right, depth of canyon toward which she dared not look, but only trusted herself prayerfully to her steady little horse.

As the trail led higher and darkness settled, the cold grew intense and Rhoda cowered and shivered. Yet through her fear and discomfort was creeping surprise that her strength had endured even this long. In a spot where the trail widened Kut-le dropped back beside her and she felt the warm folds of a Navajo blanket about her shoulders. Neither she nor the Indian spoke. The madness of the night before, the fear and disgust of the afternoon, gave way, slowly, to a lethargy of exhaustion. All thought of her frightful predicament, of her friends' anxiety, of Kut-le's treachery was dulled by a weariness so great that she could only cling to the saddle and pray for the trail to end.

Kut-le, riding just ahead, glanced back constantly at the girl's dim figure. But Rhoda was beyond pleading or protesting. The trail twisted and undulated on and on. Each moment Rhoda felt less certain of her seat. Each moment the motion of the horse grew more painful. At last a faint odor of pine-needles roused her sinking senses and she opened her heavy eyes. They had left the sickening edge of the canyon and Alchise was leading them into a beautiful growth of pines where the mournful hooting of owls gave a graveyard sadness to the moon-flecked shadows.

Here, in a long aisle of columnar pines, Kut-le called the first halt. Rhoda reeled in her saddle. Before her horse had stopped, Kut-le was beside her, unfastening her waist strap and lifting her to the ground. He pulled the blanket from his own shoulders and Molly stretched it on the soft pine-needles. Rhoda, half delirious, looked up into the young Indian's face with the pathetic unconsciousness of a sick child. He laid her carefully on the blanket, where she immediately closed her eyes. The two squaws hurriedly knelt at Rhoda's side and with clever hands rubbed and manipulated the slender, exhausted body until the girl opened her languid eyes.

Kut-le, while this was being done, stood quietly by the blanket, his fine face stern and intent. When Rhoda opened her eyes he put aside the two squaws, knelt and raised the girl's head and held a cup of the rich broth to her lips. It was cold, yet it tasted good, and Rhoda finished the cup without protest, then struggled to a sitting position. After a moment, Kut-le raised her gently to her feet. Here, however, she pushed him away and walked unsteadily to her horse. Kut-le's hands dropped to his side and he stood in the moonlight, watching the frail, boyish figure clamber with infinite travail into the saddle.

FROM the pine-wood the trail led downward. The rubbing and the broth had put new life into Rhoda and for a little while she kept a clear brain. For the first time it occurred to her that instead of following the Indians so stupidly she ought to watch her chance and at the first opportunity make a wild dash off into the darkness. Kut-le was so sure of her weakness and cowardice that she felt he would be taken completely by surprise and she might elude him. With a definite purpose in her mind she was able to fight off again and again the blur of weakness that threatened her.

As the trail widened in the descent, Kut-le rode in beside her.

"Feeling better?" he asked cheerfully.

Rhoda made no reply. Such a passion of hatred for the man shook her that words failed her. She turned a white face on him, her eyes black, her nostrils quivering with passion.

Kut-le laughed softly:

"Hate me, Rhoda! Hate me as much as you wish! That's a heap more hopeful than indifference. I'll bet you aren't think-

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ing of dying of ennui now, are you, dear?"

What fiend, thought Rhoda ever had induced her to make a friend of this savage! She clung to the pommel of her saddle, her eyes fastened on him. If only he would drop dead as he sat! If only his Indians would turn on him and kill him!

They were riding through the desert now—desert thick grown with cactus and sagebrush. Suddenly a faraway roar came to Rhoda's ears. There was a faint whistle repeated with increasing loudness. Off to the north appeared a light that grew till it threw a dazzling beam on the strange little waiting group. The train passed, a half-dozen dimly lighted Pullmans. The roaring decreased, the whistle sounded lower and lower and the night was silent.

Rhoda sat following the last dim light with burning eyes. Kut-le led the way from the difficult going of the desert to the road-bed. As Rhoda saw the long line of rails, the panic of the previous night overwhelmed her. Like a mad thing, unmindful of the strap about her waist, she threw herself from the saddle and hung against the stolid pony. Kut-le dismounted and undid the strap. The girl dropped to the ties and lay crouched with her face against the steel rail.

"Oh, John! Oh, John DeWitt!" she sobbed.

"Alchise, go ahead with the horses," said Kut-le. "Wait for me at the painted rock."

Then as the Indians became indistinguishable along the track, he lifted Rhoda to her feet.

"Walk for a while," he said. "It will rest you. Poor little girl! I wish I could have managed differently, but this was best for you. Come, don't be afraid of me!"

Some savage instinct stirred in Rhoda. For the first time in her life she felt an insane joy in anger.

"I'm not afraid of you, you Apache Indian!" she said clearly. "I loathe you! Your touch poisons me! But I'm not afraid of you. I shall choke myself with my bare hands before you shall harm me! And if you keep me long enough I shall try to kill you!"

Kut-le gave a short laugh:

"Listen, Rhoda; your protests show that you are afraid of me. But you need not be. Your protection lies in the fact that I love you—love you with all the passion of a savage, all the restraint of a Caucasian. I'd rather die than harm you! Why, girl, I'm *saving* you, not destroying you! Rhoda! Dear one!" He paused and Rhoda could hear his quickened breath. Then he added lightly, "Let's get on with our little stroll!"

Rhoda wrung her hands and groaned. Only to escape—to escape! Suddenly turning, she ran down the track. Kut-le watched her, motionless, until she had run perhaps a hundred yards, then with a few mighty leaps he overtook her and gathered her to his great chest. Moaning, Rhoda lay still.

"Dear," said Kut-le, "don't exert yourself foolishly. If you must escape, lay your plans carefully. Use your brain. Don't act like a child. I love you, Rhoda!"

"I loathe you! I loathe you!" whispered the girl.

"You don't—ah——" He stopped abruptly and set the girl on the ground.

They were standing beside a side track near a desert water-tank.

"I've caught my foot in a switch-frog," muttered Kut-le, keeping his hold on Rhoda with one hand while with the other he tugged at his moccasined foot.

Rhoda stood rigid.

"I hear a train!" she cried. "Oh, dear God, I hear a train!" Then, "The other Indians are too far away to reach you before the train does," she added calmly.

"But I'll never loose my grip on you," returned the Indian grimly.

He tore at the imprisoned foot, ripping the moccasin and tearing at the road-bed. The rails began to sing. Far down the track they saw a star of light. Rhoda's heart stood still. This, then, was to be the end! After all the months of distant menace, death was to be upon her in a moment! This, then, was to be the solution, and though with all the horror of what life might mean to her clear before her, she cried out with a sob, "Oh, not this way! Not this way!"

Kut-le gave her a quick push. "Hurry," he said, "and try to remember good things of me!"

With a cry of joy Rhoda jumped from the track, then stopped. There flashed across her inner vision the face of young Cartwell, debonair and dark, with unfathomable eyes; young Cartwell who had saved her life when the scorpion had bitten her, who had spent hours trying to lead her back to health. Instantly she turned and staggered back to the Indian.

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"I can't let a human being die like a trapped animal!" she panted, and she threw herself wildly against him.

Kut-le fell at the unexpected impact of her weight and his foot was freed! He lifted Rhoda, leaped from the track and the second section of the tourist train thundered into the west!

"You are as fine as I thought you were——" he began. But Rhoda was a limp heap at his feet.

The girl partially came to her senses when Kut-le set her in the saddle and fastened her there with strap and blanket. But happily she was practically unconscious for the hour or two that remained till dawn. Just as day was breaking, the Indians made their way across an arroyo and up a long slope to a goup of cottonwoods. Here Rhoda was put to bed on a heap of blankets.

CHAPTER XII

MOLLY

SOME time in the afternoon she awoke with a clear head. It was the first time in months that she had wakened without a headache. She stared from the shade of the cottonwoods to the distant lavender haze of the desert. There was not a sound in all the world. Mysterious, remote, the desert stared back at her, mocking her little grief. More terrible to her than her danger in Kut-le's hands, more appaling than the death threat that had hung over her so long, was this sense of awful space, of barren nothingness with which the desert oppressed her. Instinctively she turned to look for human companionship. Kut-le and Alchise were not to be seen, but Molly nodded beside Rhoda's blankets and the thin hag Cesca was curled in the grass near-by, asleep.

"You awake? Heap hungry?" asked Molly suddenly.

Rhoda sat up, groaning at the torturing stiffness of her muscles.

"Where is Kut-le?" she asked.

"Gone get 'em supper. Alchise gone too."

"Molly," Rhoda took the rough brown hand between both her soft cold palms, "Molly, will you help me to run away?"

Molly looked from the clasping fingers up to Rhoda's sweet face. Molly was a squaw, dirty and ignorant. Rhoda was the delicate product of a highly cultivated civilization, egoistic, narrow-viewed, self-centered. And yet Rhoda, looking into Molly's deep brown eyes saw there that limitless patience and fortitude and gentleness which is woman's without regard to class or color. And not knowing why, the white girl bowed her head on the squaw's fat shoulder and sobbed a little.

A strange look came into Molly's face. She was childless and had worked fearfully to justify her existence to her tribe. Few hands had touched hers in tenderness. Few voices had appealed to her for sympathy. Suddenly Molly clasped Rhoda in her strong arms and swayed back and forth with her gently.

"You no cry!" she said. "You no cry, little sun-head, you no cry!"

"Molly, dear, kind Molly, won't you help me to get back to my own people?" Suppose it was your daughter that a white man had stolen! Oh, Molly, I want to go home!"

Molly still rocked and spoke in the singsong voice one uses to a sobbing child.

"You no run 'way! Kut-le catch right off! Make it all harder for you!"

Rhoda shivered a little.

"If I once get away, Kut-le never will catch me alive!"

Molly chuckled indulgently.

"How you run? No sabe how eat, how drink, how find the trail! Better stay with Molly."

"I would wait till I thought we were near a town. Won't you help me? Dear, kind Molly, won't you help me?"

"Kut-le kill Molly with cactus torture!"

"But you go with me!" The sobs ceased and Rhoda sat back on her blankets as the idea developed. "You go with me and I'll make you——"

Neither noticed the soft thud of moccasined feet. Suddenly Alchise seized Molly's black hair and with a violent jerk pulled the woman backward. Rhoda forgot her stiffened muscles, forgot her gentle ancestry. She sprang at Alchise with cat-like fury and struck his fingers from Molly's hair.

"You fiend! I wish I could shoot you!" she panted, her finger twitching.

Alchise retreated a step. "She try help 'em run!" he said sullenly.

"She was not! And no matter if she was! Don't you touch a woman before me!"

A swift shadow crossed the camp and Alchise was hurled six feet away.

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"What's the matter!" cried Kut-le. "Has he laid finger on you, Rhoda?"

He strode to her side and looked down on her with eyes in which struggled anger and anxiety.

"No!" blazed Rhoda. "But he pulled Molly over backward by her hair!"

"Oh!" in evident relief. "And what was Molly doing?"

"She maybe help 'em run," said Alchise, coming forward.

The relief in Kut-le's voice increased Rhoda's anger.

"No such thing! She was persuading me not to go! Kut-le, you give Alchise orders not to touch Molly again. I won't have it!"

"Oh, that's not necessary," said Kut-le, serenely. "Indians are pretty good to their women as a general thing. They average up with the whites, I guess. Molly, get up and help Cesca with these."

He flung some new-killed rabbits at the gaping squaw who still lay where she had fallen. Rhoda, trembling and glowering, walked unsteadily up and down beneath the cottonwoods. The details of her new existence, the dirt, the roughness were beginning to sink in on her. She paced back and forth, lips compressed, eyes black. Kut-le stood with his back against a cottonwood eying the slender figure with frank delight. Now and again he chuckled as he rolled a cigarette with his facile finger. His hands were fine as only an Indian's can be; strong and sinewy yet supple, with slender fingers and almond-shaped nails.

He smoked contentedly with his eyes on the girl. Inscrutable as was his face at a casual glance, had Rhoda observed keenly, she might have read much in the changing light of his eyes. There was appreciation of her and love of her and a merciless determination to hold her at all costs. And still, as he gazed, there was that tragedy in his look, which is part and portion of the Indian's face.

A SILENCE in the camp had continued for some time when a strange young Indian strode up the slope, nodded to the group in the camp, and deliberately rolled himself in a blanket and dropped to sleep. Rhoda stared at him questioningly.

"Alchise's and Cesca's son," said Kut-le. "His job is to follow us at a distance and remove all trace of our trail. Not an overturned pebble misses his eye. I'll need him only for a day or two."

"Kut-le," said Rhoda suddenly, "when are you going to end the farce and let me go?"

The young man smiled. "You know the way the farce usually ends! The man always gets the girl and they live happily forever after!"

"What do you suppose Jack and Katherine think of you? They have loved and trusted you so!"

For the first time the Indian's face showed pain.

"My hope is," he said, "that after they see how happy I am going to make you they will forgive me."

Rhoda controlled her voice with difficulty. "Can't you see what you have done? No matter what the outcome, can you believe that I or any one that loves me can forgive the outrage to me?"

"After we have married and lived abroad for a year or two, people will remember only the romance of it!"

"Heavens!" ejaculated Rhoda. She returned to her angry walking.

Molly was preparing supper. She worked always with one eye on Rhoda, as if she could not see enough of the girl's fragile loveliness. With her attention thus divided, she stumbled constantly, dropping the pots and spilling the food. She herself was not at all disturbed by her mishaps, but with a grimace and a chuckle picked up the food. But Cesca was annoyed. She was tending the fire which by a marvel of skill she kept always clear and all but smokeless. At each of Molly's mishaps Cesca hurled a stone at her back with a savage "Me-yah!" that disturbed Molly not at all.

Mercifully, night was on the camp by the time the rabbits were cooked, and Rhoda ate, unconscious of the dirt the food had acquired in the cooking. When the silent meal was finished, Kut-le pointed to Rhoda's blankets:

"We will start in half an hour. You must rest during that time."

Too weary to resent the peremptory tone, Rhoda obeyed. The fire long since had been extinguished and the camp was dark. The Indians were to be located only by faint whispers under the trees. The opportunity seemed providential! Rhoda slipped from her blankets and crept through the darkness away from the camp.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST LESSON

AFTER crawling on her hands and knees for several yards Rhoda rose and started on a run down the long slope to the open desert. But after a few steps she found running impossible, for the slope was a wilderness of rock, thickly grown with cholla and yucca with here and there a thicker growth of cat's-claw.

Almost at once her hands were torn and bleeding and she thought gratefully for the first time of her buckskin trousers which valiantly resisted all detaining thorns. The way dropped rapidly, and after her first wild spurt Rhoda leaned exhausted and panting against a boulder. She had not the vaguest idea of where she was going or of what she was going to do, except that she was going to lose herself so thoroughly that not even Kut-le could find her. After that she was quite willing to trust to fate.

After a short rest she started on, every sense keen for the sound of pursuit, but none came. As the silent minutes passed Rhoda became elated. How easy it was! What a pity that she had not tried before! At the foot of the slope, she turned up the arroyo. Here her course grew heavier. The arroyo was cut by deep ruts over which the girl slid and tumbled in mad haste only to find rock masses over which she crawled with utmost difficulty. Now and again the stout vamps of her hunting-boots were pierced by chollas and, half-frantic in her haste, she was forced to stop and struggle to pull out the thorns.

It was not long before the girl's scant strength was gone and when, after a mad scramble, she fell from a boulder to the ground, she was too done up to rise. She lay face to the stars, half-sobbing with excitement and disappointment. After a time, however, the sobs ceased and she lay thinking. She knew now that, until she was enured to the desert and had a working knowledge of its ways, escape was impossible. She must bide her time and wait for her friends to rescue her.

She had no idea how far she had come from the Indian camp. Whether or not Kut-le could find her again she could not guess. If he did not, then, unless a white stumbled on her, she must die in the desert. Well then, let it be so! The old lethargy closed in on her and she lay motionless and hopeless.

From all sides she heard the night howls of the coyote packs circling nearer and nearer. Nothing could more perfectly interpret the horrible desolation of the desert, Rhoda thought, than the demoniacal, long-drawn laughter of the coyote. How long she lay she neither knew nor cared. But just as she fancied that the coyotes had drawn so near that she could hear their footsteps, a hand was laid on her arm.

"Have you had enough, Rhoda?" asked Kut-le.

"No!" shuddered Rhoda. "I'd rather die here!"

The Indian laughed softly as he lifted her from the ground.

"A good hater makes a good lover, Rhoda," he said. "I wish I'd had time to let you learn your lesson more thoroughly. I haven't been twenty-five feet away from you since you left the camp. I wanted you to try your hand at it just so you'd realize what you are up against. But you've tired yourself badly."

Rhoda lay mute in the young man's arms. She was not thinking of his words but of the first time that the Indian had carried her. In her mind she saw John DeWitt's protesting face in the orchard, and tears of weakness and despair ran silently down her cheeks. Kut-le strode rapidly and unhesitatingly over the course she had followed so painfully, and in a few moments they were among the waiting Indians.

Kut-le put Rhoda in her saddle, fastened her securely and put a Navajo about her shoulders. The night's misery was begun. Whether they went up and down mountains, whether they crossed deserts, Rhoda neither knew nor cared. The blind purpose of clinging to the saddle was the one aim of the dreadful night. She was a little lightheaded at times and with her head against the horse's neck she murmured John DeWitt's name, or sitting erect, she called to him wildly.

At such times Kut-le's fingers tightened and he clenched his teeth, but he did not go to her. When, however, the frail figure drooped silently and inertly against the waist strap, he seemed to know it even in the darkness. Then and then only he lifted her down, the squaws massaged her wracked body and she was put in the saddle again. Over and over during the night this was repeated, until at dawn Rhoda was barely-

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conscious that after being lifted to the ground she was not remounted but was covered carefully and left in peace.

IT WAS late in the afternoon again when Rhoda woke. She pushed aside her blankets and tried to get up, but fell back with a groan. The stiffness of the previous days was nothing whatever to the misery that now held every muscle rigid. The over-exertion of three nights in the saddle, which the massaging so far had mitigated, had asserted itself and every muscle in the girl's body seemed acutely painful. To lift her hand to her hair, to draw a long breath, to turn her head was almost impossible.

Rhoda looked dismally about her. The camp this time was on the side of a mountain that lay in a series of mighty ranges, each separated from the other by a narrow strip of desert. White and gold gleamed the snow-capped peaks. Purple and lavender melted the shimmering desert into the lifting mesas. Rhoda threw her arm across her eyes to hide the hateful sight and moaned in pain at the movement.

Molly ran to her side.

"Your bones heap sick? Molly rub 'em?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, Molly, if you would!" replied Rhoda gratefully, and she wondered at the skill and gentleness of the Indian woman who manipulated the aching muscles with such rapidity and firmness that in a little while Rhoda staggered stiffly to her feet.

"Molly," she said, "I want to wash my face."

Molly puckered up her own face in her effort to understand, and scratched her head.

"Don't *sabe* that," she said.

"Wash my face!" repeated Rhoda in astonishment. "Of course you understand."

Molly laughed:

"No! You no wash! No use! You just get cold—heap cold!"

"Molly!" called Kut-le's authoritative voice.

Molly went flying toward the packs from which she returned with a canteen and a tiny pitch-smeared basket. Kut-le followed with a towel. He grinned at Rhoda:

"Molly is possessed with the idea that anything as frail as you would be snuffed out like a candle by a drop of water. You and I each possess a lone lorn towel which we must wash out, ourselves, till the end of the trip. The squaws don't know when a thing is clean."

Rhoda took the towel silently and the young Indian, after waiting a minute as if in hope of a word from her, left the girl to her difficult toilet. When Rhoda had finished she picked up the field-glasses that Kut-le had left on her blankets and with her back to the Indians sat down on a rock to watch the desert.

The sordid discomforts of the camp seemed to her unbearable. She hated the blue haze of the desert below and beyond her. She hated the very ponies that Alchise was leading up from water. It was the fourth day since her abduction. Rhoda could not understand why John and the Newmans were so slow to overtake her. She knew nothing as yet of the skill of her abductors. She was like an ignorant child placed in a new world whose very A B C was closed to her. After always having been cared for and protected, after never having known a hardship, the girl suddenly was thrust into an existence whose savage simplicity was sufficient to try the hardiest man.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VOICE FROM THE BUSHES

SUPPER was eaten in silence, Kut-le finally giving up his attempts to make conversation. It was dusk when they mounted and rode up the mountain. Near the crest a whirling cloud of mist enveloped them. It became desperately cold and Rhoda shivered beneath her Navajo, but Kut-le gave no heed to her. He led on and on, the horses slipping, the cold growing every minute more intense. At last there appeared before them a dim figure silhouetted against a flickering light. Kut-le halted his party and rode forward; Rhoda saw the dim figure rise hastily and after a short time Kut-le called back.

"Come ahead!"

The little camp was only an open space at the canyon edge, with a sheepskin shelter over a tiny fire. Beside the fire stood a shepherd, a swarthy figure wrapped from head to foot in sheepskins. Over in the darkness by the mountain wall were the many nameless sounds that tell of animals herding for the night. The shepherd greet-

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ed them with the perfect courtesy of the Mexican.

"Señors, the camp is yours!"

Kut-le lifted the shivering Rhoda from her horse. The rain was lessening, but the cold was still so great that Rhoda huddled gratefully by the little fire under the sheep-skin shelter. Kut-le refused the Mexican's offer of tortillas and the man sat down to enjoy their society. He eyed Rhoda keenly.

"Ah! It is a señorita!" Then he gasped. "It is perhaps the Señorita Rhoda Tuttle!"

Rhoda jumped to her feet.

"Yes! Yes! How did you know?"

Kut-le glared at the herder menacingly, but the little fellow did not see. He spoke up bravely, as if he had a message for Rhoda:

"Some people told me yesterday. They look for her everywhere!"

Rhoda's eyes lighted joyfully.

"Who? Where?" she cried.

Kut-le spoke concisely:

"You know nothing!" he said.

The Mexican looked into the Apache's eyes and shivered slightly.

"Nothing, of course, señor," he replied.

But Rhoda was not daunted.

"Who were they?" she repeated. "What did they say? Where did they go?"

The herder glanced at Rhoda and shook his head. "*Quién sabe?*"

Rhoda turned to Kut-le in anger.

"Don't be more brutal than you have to be!" she cried. "What harm can it do for this man to give me word of my friends?"

Kut-le's eyes softened.

"Answer the señorita's questions, *amigo*," he said.

The Mexican began eagerly:

"There were three. They rode up the trail one day ago. They called the dark man Porter, the big blue-eyed one DeWitt, and the yellow-haired one Newman."

Rhoda clasped her hands with a little murmur of relief.

"The blue-eyed one acted as if locoed. They cursed much at a name, 'Kut-le.' But otherwise they talked little. They went that way," pointing back over the trail. "They had found a scarf with a stone tied in it——"

"What's that?" interrupted Kut-le sharply.

Rhoda's eyes shone in the firelight.

"'Not an overturned pebble escapes his eye!'" she said serenely.

"Bully for you!" exclaimed Kut-le, smiling at Rhoda in understanding. "However, I guess we will move on, having gleaned this interesting news."

He remounted his little party. Rhoda reeled a little, but she made no protest. As they took to the trail again the sheep-herder stood by the fire, watching, and Rhoda called to him:

"If you see them again tell them that I'm all right but that they must hurry!"

Rhoda felt new life in her veins after the meeting with the sheep-herder, and finished the night's trail in better shape than she had done before. Yet not the next day nor for many days did they sight pursuers. With ingenuity that seemed diabolical, Kut-le laid his course. He seldom moved hurriedly. Indeed, except for the fact that the traveling was done by night, the expedition had every aspect of unlimited leisure.

AS THE days passed, Rhoda forced herself to the calm of desperation. Slowly she realized that she was in the hands of the masters of the art of flight, an art that the very cruelty of the country abetted. But to her utter astonishment her delirium of physical misery began to lift. Saddle-stiffness after the first two weeks left her. Though Kut-le still fastened her to the saddle by the waist strap, and rested her for a short time every hour or so during the night's ride, the hours in the saddle ceased to tax her strength. She was surprised to find that she could eat—eat the wretched cooking of the squaws!

At last she laid out a definite course for herself. Every night on the trail and at every camp she tried to leave some mark for the whites—a scratch on pebble or stone, a bit of marked yucca or a twisted cat's-claw. She ceased entirely to speak to Kut-le, treating him with a contemptuous silence that was torture to the Indian, though he gave no outward sign.

Molly was her devoted friend, and Rhoda derived great comfort from this faithful servitor. Rhoda sat in the camp one afternoon with the two squaws while Kut-le and Alchise were off on a turkey hunt. Some of the girl's pallor had given way to a delicate tan. The dark circles about her eyes had lightened a little. Molly was busily pounding grass-seeds between two

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stones. Rhoda watched her idly. Suddenly a new idea sent the blood to her thin cheeks.

Why shouldn't she learn to make seed-meal, to catch and cook rabbits, to distinguish edible cactus from inedible? Then indeed she would be able to care for herself on the trail! To Rhoda, who never had worked with her hands, who indeed had come to look on manual labor as belonging to inferiors, the idea was revolutionary. For a long time she turned it over in her mind, watching Molly the while. The most violent housewifely task that Rhoda ever had undertaken had been the concocting of chafing-dish messes at school.

"Molly," she said, suddenly, "teach me how to do that."

Molly paused and grinned delightedly.

"All right! You come help poor Molly."

With Cesca looking on sardonically, Molly poured fresh seeds on her rude *metate* and showed Rhoda the grinding-roll that flattened and broke the little grains. Despite her weak fingers Rhoda took to the work easily. As she emptied out the first handful of meal, a curious sense of pleasure came to her. Squatting before the *metate*, she looked at the little pile of bruised seeds with the utmost satisfaction. Molly poured more seeds on the *metate* and Rhoda began again. She was hard at her task, her cheeks flushed with interest, when Kut-le returned. Rhoda did not see the sudden look of pleasure in his eyes.

"You will tire yourself," he said.

Rhoda did not answer, but poured another handful of seeds on the *metate*.

"You'll begin to like the life," he went on, "by the time you are educated enough to leave us." He turned teasingly to Cesca: "You think the white squaw can cross the desert soon by herself?"

Cesca spat disdainfully:

"No! White squaw no good. All time sit, sit, no work! Kut-le heap fool!"

"Oh, Cesca," cried Rhoda, "I'm too sick to work! And see this meal I've made! Isn't it good?"

Cesca glanced disdainfully at the little heap of meal Rhoda had bruised out so painfully.

"Huh!" she grunted. "Feed 'em to the horses. Injuns no eat 'em."

Rhoda looked from the meal to her slender, tired fingers. Cesca's contempt hurt her unaccountably. In her weakness her cleft chin quivered. She turned to Molly:

"Do you think it's so very bad, Molly?"

That faithful friend grunted with rage and aimed a vicious kick at Cesca. Then she put a protecting arm about Rhoda:

"It's heap fine! Cesca just old fool. You love Molly. Let Cesca go to ——!"

Kut-le had been watching the little scene with tender eyes. Now he stooped and lifted Rhoda to her feet, then he raised one of the delicate hands and touched it softly with his lips.

"Leave such work to the squaws, dear. You aren't built for it. Cesca, you old lobster, you make me tired! Go fix the turkeys!"

Cesca rose with dignity, flipped away her cigarette and walked with a sniff over to the cooking-pot. Rhoda drew her hands from the young Indian's clasp and walked to the edge of the camp. The hot pulse that the touch of Kut-le's lips sent through her body startled her.

"I hate him!" she said to herself. "I hate him! I hate him!"

The trail that night was unusually difficult, and Rhoda had to be rested frequently. At each stop Kut-le tried to talk to her, but she maintained her silence. They paused at dawn in a pocket formed by the meeting of three divergent canyons. Far, far above the desert as they were, still farther above them stretched the wonderful barren ridges, snow-capped and silent.

As Rhoda stood waiting for the squaws to spread her blankets the peaks were lighted suddenly by the rays of the still unseen sun. For one unspeakable instant their snow crowns flashed a translucent scarlet that trembled, then melted to pink, then to a white so pure, so piercing that Rhoda trembled with sudden awe. Then the sun rolled into view, blinding her eyes, and she turned to her waiting blankets.

She had slept for several hours when she was wakened by a soft tap on her shoulder. She opened her eyes and would have risen but a voice whispered:

"Hush! Don't move!"

CHAPTER XV

A SNEEZE AND WHAT CAME OF IT

RHODA lay stiffly, her heart beating wildly. Kut-le and the squaws, each a muffled blanketed figure, lay sleeping some distance away. Old Alchise stood on

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solitary guard at the edge of the camp with his back to her.

"Make as if you wanted to shift your blankets toward the cat's-claw bush behind you!" went on the whispered voice somewhere behind a bush.

Obediently, Rhoda sat erect. Alchise turned slowly to light a cigarette out of the wind. Rhoda yawned, rose sleepily, looked under her blanket and shook her head irritably, then dragged her blankets toward the neighboring cat's-claw. Again she settled herself to sleep. Alchise turned back to his view of the desert.

"I'm behind the bush here," whispered the voice. "I'm a prospector. Saw you make camp. I don't know where any of the search parties are, but if you can crawl round to me I'll guarantee to get you to 'em somehow. Slip out of your blankets and leave 'em rounded up as if you was still under 'em. Quick now and careful!"

Rhoda, her eyes never leaving Alchise's impassive back, drew herself silently and swiftly from her blankets and with a clever touch or two rounded them. Then she crept around the cat's-claw where a man squatted, his eyes blazing with excitement. He put up a sinewy hand to pull her from sight, when without warning Rhoda sneezed!

Instantly there was the click of a rifle and Alchise shouted: "Stop!"

"Confound it!" growled the man, rising to full view, "why didn't you swallow it?"

"I couldn't!" replied Rhoda indignantly. "You don't suppose I wanted to!"

She turned toward the camp. Alchise was standing stolidly covering them with his rifle. Kut-le walked coolly toward them while the squaws sat gaping.

"Well!" exclaimed Kut-le, "what can we do for you, Jim?"

The stranger, a rough tramp-like fellow in tattered overalls, wiped his face on which was a week's stubble.

"I'd always thought you was about white, Cartwell," he said, "but I see you're no better than the rest of them. What are you going to do with me?"

Kut-le eyed his unbidden guest speculatively:

"Well, we'll have something to eat first. I don't like to think on an empty stomach. Come over to my blanket and sit down, Jim."

Ignoring Rhoda, who was watching him closely, Kut-le seated himself on his blanket beside Jim and offered him a cigarette, which was refused.

"I don't want no favors from you, Cartwell." His voice was surly. There was something more than his rough appearance that Rhoda disliked about the man, but she didn't know just what it was. Kut-le's eyes narrowed, but he lighted his own cigarette without replying. "You're up to a rotten trick and you know it, Cartwell!" went on Jim. "You take my advice and let me take the girl back to her friends and you make tracks down into Mexico as fast as the Lord'll let you."

Kut-le shifted the Navajo that hung over his naked shoulders. He gave a short laugh that Rhoda had never heard from him before.

"Let her go with you, Jim Provenso? You know as well as I do that she is safer with an Apache! Anything else?"

"Yes, this else!" Jim's voice rose angrily. "If ever we get a chance at you, we'll hang you sky high, see? This may go with Injuns, but not with whites, you dirty pup!"

Suddenly Kut-le rose and, dropping his blanket, stood before the white man in savage symmetry.

"Provenso, you aren't fit to look at a decent woman. Don't put on dog just because you belong to the white race. You're disreputable, and you know it. Don't speak to Miss Tuttle again, you are too rotten."

The prospector had risen and stood glaring at Kut-le.

"I'll kill you for that yet, you dirty Injun!" he shouted.

"Shucks!" sniffed the Indian. "You haven't the nerve to injure anything but a woman!"

Jim's face went purple:

"For two bits I'd knock your block off, right now!"

"There isn't a cent in the camp." Kut-le turned to Rhoda. "You get the point of the conversation, I hope?"

Rhoda's eyes were blazing. She had got the point, and yet, Jim was a white man! Anything white was better than an Indian.

"I'd take my chances with Mr. Provenso," she said, joyfully conscious that nothing could have hurt Kut-le more than this reply.

Kut-le's lips stiffened.

"Lunch is ready," he said.

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"None of *your* grub for mine!" remarked Jim. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Alchise!" called Kut-le. "Eat something, then take this fellow out and lose him. Take the rest of the day to it. You know the next camp."

THEN he folded his arms across his chest and waited for Alchise to finish his meal. Jim stood in sullen silence for a minute. Then he seated himself on a near-by rock.

"No you don't," he said. "If you get me out of here, you'll have to use force."

Kut-le shrugged his shoulders.

"A gun at your back will move you."

Rhoda was looking at the white man's face with a great longing. He was rough and ugly, but he was of her own breed. Suddenly the longing for her own that she was beginning to control surged to her lips.

"I can't bear this!" she cried. "I'm going mad! I'm going mad!"

All the camp turned startled faces toward the girl, and Rhoda recovered her self-possession. She ran to Kut-le and laid her hand on his arm, lifting a lovely, pleading face to his.

"Oh, Kut-le! Kut-le!" in the tone that she had used to Cartwell, "can't you see that it's no use? He is white, Kut-le! Let me go with him! Let me go back to my own people! Oh, Kut-le, let me go! Oh, let me go!"

Kut-le looked down at the hand on his arm. Rhoda was too excited to notice that his whole body shook at this unwonted touch. His voice was caressing, but his face remained inscrutable.

"Dear girl," he answered, "he is not your kind. He might originally have been of your color, but now he's streaked with yellow. Let him go! You are safer here with me!"

Rhoda turned from him impatiently.

"It's quite useless," she said to Jim; "no pleading or threat will move him. But I do thank you——" her voice breaking a little. "Go back with Alchise and tell them to come for me quickly!"

Some responsive flash of sympathy came to Jim's bleared eyes. Rhoda stood watching Alchise marshal him out of the camp. She moaned helplessly:

"Oh, my people, my own people!" And Kut-le eyed her with unfathomable gaze.

As soon as lunch was finished, camp was broken. All the rest of the day and until well toward midnight they wound up a wretched trail that circled the mountain ranges. For hours Kut-le did not speak to Rhoda. These days of Rhoda's contempt were very hard on him. The touch of her hand that morning, the old note in her voice still thrilled him. At midnight as they watched the squaws unroll her blankets, he touched her shoulder.

"Dear!" he said, in his rich voice, "it is in you to love me if only I am patient. And —God, but it's worth all the starvation in the meantime! Won't you say good night to me, Rhoda?"

Rhoda looked at the stalwart figure in the firelight. The young eyes so tragic in their youth, the beautiful mouth, sad in its firm curves, were strangely appealing. Just for an instant the horrors of the past weeks vanished.

"Good night!" said Rhoda.

Then she rolled herself in her blankets and slept. By the next morning, however, the old repulsion had returned and she made no response to Kut-le's overtures.

CHAPTER XVI

A BROADENING HORIZON

DAY succeeded day now, until Rhoda lost all track of time. Endlessly they crossed desert and mountain ridges. Endlessly they circled through dusky canyon and sun-baked arroyo. Always Rhoda looked forward to each new camping-place with excitement. Here the rescuers might stumble upon them! Always she started at each unexpected shadow along the trail. Always she thrilled at wisp of smokelike cloud beyond the canyon edge. Always she felt a quiver of certainty at a sudden break of twig or fall of stone. But the days passed fruitlessly, and gradually hope changed to desperation.

The difficulties of the camp living would have been unbearable to her had not her natural fortitude and her intense pride come to her rescue. The estimate of her that Kut-le had so mercilessly presented to her the first day of her abduction returned to her more and more clearly as the days wore on. At first she thought of them only with scorn.

Then as her loneliness increased and she was forced back upon herself she grew to

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wonder what in her had given the Indian such an opinion. There was something in the nakedness of the desert, something in its piercing austerity that forced her to truthfulness with herself. Little by little she found herself trying to acquire Kut-le's view of her.

Her liking for Molly grew. She spent long afternoons with the squaw, picking up desert lore.

"Do you like to work, Molly?" she asked the squaw one afternoon, as she sorted seed for Molly to bruise.

"What else to do?" asked Molly. "Sit with hands folded on stomach, so? No! Still hands make crazy head. Now you work with your hands you no so sorry in head, huh?"

Rhoda thought for a moment. There was a joy in the rude camp tasks she had assumed that she never had found in golf or automobiling. She nodded, then said wistfully:

"You think I'm no good at all, don't you, Molly?"

Molly shrugged her shoulders.

"Me not got papooses. You not got papooses. Molly and you no good! Molly is heap strong. What good is that? When she die she no has given her strength to tribe, no done any good that will last. You are heap beautiful. What good is that? You no give your face to your tribe. What good are you? Molly and you might as well die to-morrow. Work, have papooses, die. That all squaws are for. Great Spirit says so. Squaw's own heart says so."

Rhoda sat silently looking at the squaw's squat figure, the toil-scarred fingers, the good brown eyes out of which looked a woman's soul. Vaguely Rhoda caught a point of view that made her old ideals seem futile. She smoothed the Indian woman's hands.

"I sometimes think you are a bigger woman than I am, Molly," she said humbly.

"You heap good to look at," Molly spoke wistfully. "Molly heap homely. You think that makes difference to Great Spirit?"

Rhoda's eyes widened a little. Did it make any difference? After all, what counted with the Great Spirit? She stared at the barren ranges that lifted mute peaks to the silent heavens. Always, always the questions and so vague the answers! Suddenly Rhoda knew that her beauty had counted greatly with her all her life, had given her her sense of superiority to the rest of the world. Rhoda squirmed. She hated this faculty of the Indians and the desert to make her seem small. She never had felt so with her own kind. Her own kind! Would she never know again the deference, the gentleness, the loving tenderness of her own people? Rhoda forgot Molly's wistful question.

"Oh, Molly!" she cried. "I can't stand this! I want my own people! I want my own people!"

Molly's eyes filled with tears.

"No! No cry, little Sun-streak!" putting an arm around Rhoda and holding her to her tenderly. "Any peoples that loves you is your own peoples. Kut-le loves you. Molly loves you. We your peoples, too!"

"No! No! Never!" sobbed Rhoda. "Molly, if you love me, take me back to my own kind! You shall never leave me, Molly! I do love you. You are an Indian, but somehow I have a feeling for you I never had for any one else."

A sudden light of passionate adoration burned in Molly's eyes, a light that never was to leave them again when they gazed on Rhoda. She thought for a moment, then shook her head and looked at Rhoda.

"You ask Molly to give up her peoples but you no want to give up your peoples. You stay with Molly and Kut-le. Learn what desert say 'bout life, 'bout people. When you *sabe* what desert say 'bout that, you *sabe* much as Great Spirit!"

"Molly, listen! When Kut-le and Alchise go off on one of their hunts and Cesca goes to sleep, you and I will steal off and hide until night, and you will show me how to get home again. Oh, Molly, I'll be very good to you if you will do this for me! Don't you see how foolish Kut-le is? I can never, never marry him! His ways are not my ways. My ways are not his! Always I will be white and he Indian. He will get over this craze for me and want one of his own kind. Molly, listen to your heart! It must tell you white to the white, Indian to the Indian. Dear, dear Molly, I want to go home!"

"No! No! Molly promise Kut-le keep his white squaw for him. Injuns, they always keep promises. And Molly *sabe* some day when you learn more you be heap glad old Molly keep you for Kut-le."

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RHODA turned away with a sigh at the note of finality in Molly's voice. Kut-le was climbing the trail toward the camp with a little pile of provisions. So far he had not failed to procure when needed some sort of rations, bacon, flour and coffee, though since her abduction Rhoda had seen no human habitation. Cesca was preparing supper. She was pounding a piece of meat on a flat stone, muttering to herself when a piece fell to the ground. Sometimes she wiped the sand from the fallen bit on her skirt. More often she flung it into the stew-pot unwiped.

"Cesca!" cried Rhoda, "do keep the burro out of the meat!" The burro that Kut-le recently had acquired was sniffing at the meat.

Cesca gave no heed except to murmur, "Burro heap hungry!"

"I am going to begin to cook my own meals, Molly," said Rhoda. "I am strong enough now and Cesca is so dirty!"

Kut-le entered the camp in time to hear Rhoda's resolution.

"Will you let me eat with you?" he asked courteously. "I don't enjoy dirt, myself."

Rhoda stared at the young man. The calm effrontery of him, the cleverness of him, to ask a favor of her! She turned from him to the distant ranges. She did not realize how much she turned from the roughness of the camp to the far desert views! Brooding, aloof, how big the ranges were, how free, how calm! For the first time her keeping Kut-le in coventry seemed foolish to her. Of what avail was her silence, except to increase her own loneliness? Suddenly she smiled grimly. The game was a good one. Perhaps she could play it as well as the Indian.

"If you wish, you may," she said coldly.

Then she ignored the utter joy and astonishment in the young man's face and set about roasting the rabbit that Molly had dressed. She tossed the tortillas as Molly had taught her and baked them over the coals. She set forth the cans and baskets that formed the camp dinner-set and served the primitive meal. Kut-le watched the preparations silently. When the rabbit was cooked the two sat down on either side of the flat rock that served as a table while the other three squatted about Cesca's stew pot near the fire.

It was the first time that Rhoda and Kut-le had eaten tête-à-tête. Hitherto Rhoda had taken her food off to a secluded corner and eaten it alone. There was an intimacy in thus sitting together at the meal Rhoda had prepared, that both felt.

"Are you glad you did this for me, Rhoda?" asked Kut-le.

"I didn't do it for you!" returned Rhoda. "I did it for my own comfort.

Something in her tone narrowed the Indian's eyes.

"Why should you speak as a queen to a poor devil of a subject? By what particular mark of superiority are you exempt from work? For a time you have had the excuse of illness, but you no longer have that. I should say that making tortillas was better than sitting in sloth while they are made for you. Do you never have any sense of shame that you are forever taking and never giving?"

Rhoda answered angrily. "I'm not at all interested in your opinions."

But the young Apache went on:

"It makes me tired to hear the white women of your class talk of their equality to men! You don't do a thing to make you equal. You live off some one else. You don't even produce children. Huh! No wonder nature kicks you out with all manner of illnesses! You are mere cloggers of the machinery. For heaven's sake, wake up, Rhoda! Except for your latent possibilities, you aren't in it with Molly!"

"You have some touchstone, I suppose," replied Rhoda contemptuously, "by which you are made competent to sit in judgment on mankind!"

"I sure have!" said Kut-le. "It is that you so live that you die spiritually richer than you were born. Life is a simple thing after all. To keep one's body and soul healthy, to bear children, to give more than we take. And I believe that in the end it will seem to have been worth while."

Rhoda made no answer. Kut-le ate on in silence for a time, then he said wistfully:

"Don't you enjoy this meal with me, just a little?"

Rhoda glanced from Kut-le's naked body to her own torn clothing, then at the crude meal.

"I don't enjoy it, no," she answered quietly.

Something in the quiet sincerity of the voice caused Kut-le to rise abruptly and order the Indians to break camp. But on the trail that night he rode close beside her

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whenever the way permitted and talked to her of the beauty of the desert. At last, lashed to desperation by her indifference, he cried:

"Can't you see that your silence leads to nothing—that it maddens me?"

"That is what I want it to do," returned Rhoda calmly. "I shall be so glad if I can make you suffer a touch of what I am enduring!"

Kut-le did not reply for a moment, then he began slowly:

"You imagine that I am not suffering? Try to put yourself in my place for a moment! Can't you see how I love you? Can't you see that my stealing was the only thing that I could do, loving you so? Wouldn't you have done the same in my place? If I had been a white man I wouldn't have been driven to this. I would have had an equal chance with DeWitt and could have won easily. But I had all the prejudice against my alien race to fight. There was but one thing to do—to take you to the naked desert where you would be forced to see life as I see it, where you would be forced to see me, the man, far from any false standards of civilization."

Rhoda would have replied, but Kut-le gave her no chance.

"I know what white conventions demanded of me. But I tell you, my love is above them. I, not suffer! Rhoda! To see you in pain! To see your loathing of me! To have you helpless in my arms and yet to keep you safe! Rhoda! Rhoda! Do you believe I do not suffer?"

Anger died out of Rhoda. She saw tragedy in the situation, tragedy that was not hers. She saw herself and Kut-le racially, not individually. She saw Kut-le suffering all the helpless grief of race alienation, saw him the victim of passions as great as the desires of the alien races for the white always must be. Rhoda forgot herself. She laid a slender hand on Kut-le's.

"I am sorry," she said softly. "I think I begin to understand. But Kut-le, it can never, never be! You are fighting a battle that was lost when the white and Indian races were created. It can never, never be, Kut-le."

The strong brown hand had closed over the small white one instantly.

"It must be!" he said hoarsely. "I put my whole life on it! It must be!"

Rhoda pulled her hand away gently:

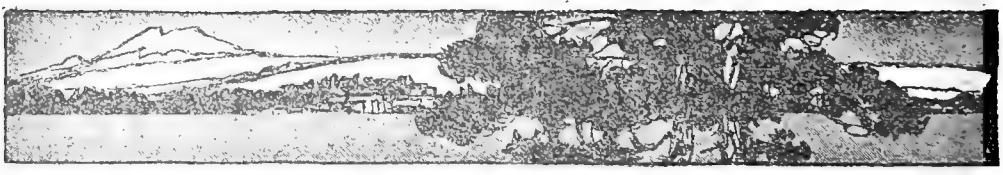
"It never, never can be!"

"It shall be! Love like this comes but seldom to a human. It is the most potent thing in the world. It shall——"

"Kut-le!" Alchise rode forward pointing to the right.

Rhoda followed his look. It was nearly dawn. At the right was the sheer wall of a mesa as smooth and impregnable to her eyes as a wall of glass. Moving toward them, silent as ghosts in the veil-like dawn, and cutting them from the mesa was a group of horsemen.

TO BE CONTINUED



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THE BUFF GAUNTLET

By

CLAIRE D. POLLEXFEN

MIDNIGHT. Old Sheridan Barnes looked up from his books as a chorus of chimes rang out announcing the hour. He nodded gravely as the solemn grandfather timepiece on the staircase gave the customary *whirr-r-r* preparatory to striking in measured, mellow tones; and outside the shuttered windows the voice of the watchman added to the din with his familiar formula:

"Twelve o'clock an' a bad, stormy night an' a-l-l's w-e-l-l!" as he paced the length of the cobbled street.

"Just such a night as this when *she* went away, poor lass, poor misguided lass! and never a word since she left me to my loneliness," muttered the old man when silence resumed its sway and the church clocks ceased to chime. He snuffed the wick of the candle with studied care, placed the crimson-silk marker in the ponderous volume in which he had been engrossed, and slowly replaced his horn-rimmed spectacles in their shabby case.

"'A bad, stormy night,' says Mr. Watchman; aye, an' so 'tis, forsooth. Heaven grant that my poor Jenny is well housed, well warmed this night!" Yet the doubt in his voice gave the lie direct to the hope that was in his words, and the prayer that he sent into the loneliness around him was followed by a glance of pitiful supplication from his upturned eyes.

Then the noise of the wind that had brought back his loss so acutely, brought another memory of the child who had passed from his life, and he smiled to himself as he rose and kicked the dying logs farther back on the wide hearth.

"'Tis a night that would have frightened her when she was a little mite of a thing—I can see her now, crouching close to the chimney-corner and looking over her shoulder as she would tell me that 'twas the season when witches rode abroad on broomsticks, and that it was a sure sign that devilment was afoot when the flame of the fire burnt blue! Poor bright-haired little Jenny! what a one you were for dreams—dreams that were too grand and too golden for a poor glover's daughter. Ah, if only you had woven the flimsy fabric of romance about my honest apprentice, how happy we might have been now, all of us! Ah, well, 'tis past and done, past and done; and I am but an old fool to stand here with the wax from the taper dripping down upon my trembling old fingers when all my little household has been abed these two hours agone."

He picked up the extinguisher of brass that shone like gold with polishing and dropped it over the flame of the taper; then by the gleam of the logs on the hearth, he made his way toward the stairs.

Then without warning came that which arrested him and sent his thoughts flying in twenty hazardous directions—the quick patter of feet upon the cobbles of the street without—and there was agitation and dismay in the very pace of the runner as he came through the storm.

"Ah, I must be growing nervous. Too much sitting up late o' nights to read my books and burn the midnight oil!" he murmured as he turned to continue the ascent. But next moment he turned back quivering and startled.

"God bless my soul!" he ejaculated aloud as the footsteps of the runner stopped sud-

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denly at his very house and a perfect hurricane of blows and knocks were rained upon his street door.

ALMOST beside himself with fear, yet possessed of a certain curiosity and hope, the old man hastily returned to the hall and, thrusting back a small grille in the center panel, looked out. Through this aperture he perceived that a man leaned like a black shadow against the railings bordering his flight of steps, while the wind tugged and tore at his cloak.

"What can you mean, sir, by disturbing a peaceable citizen at this late hour and in so peremptory a manner? Why, 'sdeath! you are as churlish as the gale itself!" cried Barnes in a gruff voice that he hoped would affright the thieves, if thieves there were, for his knees knocked together and his hands were not so steady as they might have been; moreover, he was an old man and feeble and it was rumored in the neighborhood that he kept his wealth about him.

"In the name of charity and as you hope for Heaven, open to one who is almost spent! Oh, hasten, citizen and friend, for my pursuers are close upon me!" replied the Shadow in a voice rendered thick with pain and punctuated with gasps.

"Nay, this is no tavern, sir. Seek shelter at an inn," answered Barnes, who imagined that the other was more drunk than sober.

"For God's sake, give me sanctuary or there will be innocent blood spilt upon your very steps!" implored the Shadow.

"Who can you be to demand entrance to a stranger's house when all the clocks in London have struck midnight?" persisted Barnes, gaining courage and his knees already feeling more like knees and less like water.

"On my faith, man, you shall know all—all that I can tell, if you will open to me. Unless your heart is stone, your every feeling adamant, help me!" and now the Shadow's voice was a mere whisper and Barnes felt a sudden pity for the delay his suspicions had caused when he saw the other catch convulsively at the railing spikes to prevent himself from falling to the ground. Besides, he could hear now the clatter of the pursuers as they turned into the quiet street and hailed the watch, their voices carried swiftly on the gale.

A moment later and he had drawn bolts and bar, and the man who looked so like a shadow stumbled within, to lean weak and breathless against the wall while Barnes replaced the safeguards to his house.

"In here, sir, if you please. 'Tis but my unpretending library, but there is a fire, and warmth is what one needs this night. I will make a light on the instant," and the old man led the way into the room he had vacated but a few moments before.

The Shadow—though he was close now to Barnes he still looked less of this world than the next—laid a hand upon his sleeve.

"If I might entreat you—no light other than the logs may yield! Should those who pursue me see the place in darkness like the other neighbors', 'tis odds they will pass on, thinking me further afield and still afoot. All I ask is an hour's rest, for I am fairly done."

"As you will. But take this chair here by the hearth—you are fatigued—ill, I am afraid," said Barnes as his visitor removed the wide-brimmed hat that heretofore had concealed his face and fell heavily into the chair indicated by his host.

"I am both fatigued and ill, otherwise I should never have dared to put a stranger to such inconvenience," replied the other in a voice that wavered and choked. "Hark! there go the wolf-hounds!" he whispered fiercely, shaking his clenched fist passionately in the direction of the window. As the sound of trampling feet rushed past and died away he sank wearily back in the chair, his arms hanging limp by his sides till his hands rested upon the floor, his head sunk upon his breast.

"You may make a light, old man; God's mercy on you for your trust!" he said slowly and with infinite sadness.

SHERIDAN BARNES was vastly interested, and as he complied he took notice how his guest was splashed from head to heel in mud.

"I can not but perceive that you show signs of travel," he said then, taking a bottle from the sideboard. "You have come far to-day?"

The Shadow's voice was hoarse as he replied:

"Far, yes—from the brink of death!"

Mr. Barnes looked round with a startled expression in his old eyes:

"You—you said, sir?"

"'Tis no matter. I will tell you all when

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I have splashed this dry throat of mine." He drank then in tiny sips and with much difficulty; though it was clear he was famished and weak for lack of sustenance, yet only a trickle of the liquid passed his blue, discolored lips at a time and then only with a painful effort.

And Barnes stared wonderingly, almost believing that he entertained a visitor from another world. In the silence, he had time to take note of this young man who lay all crumpled up in the chair before him, his bright, haunted eyes still fixed meditatively on the flames that licked about the new logs that had been thrown on. His face was delicately handsome, but of an extreme pallor, as though he had been deprived of light for some considerable time; his eyebrows were artificially darkened, his features exquisitely regular; but for the dull-blue tinge in the finely curved lips Barnes felt himself unable to account.

There was no jewelry whatever on the slim, white hand with which the other from time to time stroked back his unbound yellow hair. And, looking down, the old man perceived that he wore, not riding-boots as befitted the rest of his attire, but shoes whose buckles had for long lacked their native brightness. Also, though the room was warm, he kept the collar of his heavy cloak turned up about his chin.

The stranger smiled as he glanced up and saw the expression of surprise in the old man's face.

"You are thinking, no doubt, that the time has come for me to give an account of myself—and so it has and I'll begin," he said then. "My name is Roger Constance—it is not familiar to you, I see?"

Barnes shook his head:

"But few names are, save those of my customers and the great men who have written what these poor walls are proud to hold," he replied, pointing to his well-filled book-shelves.

"No matter," continued the younger man with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "it is of no importance. Yet there are those to whom it is important enough—among them the men who would have left me a dangling corpse to-night, those who have hidden me from the world for many weary days, many long and stifling nights when my heart ached for the open country—and found but the cramped dimensions of a felon's cell!"

II

"IN THE north of England the name of Roger Constance is not only known by all, but feared to no small degree by the rich. There they give a twist to my name and call me rogue. The Midlands also have seen the sparks fly from my brave mare's hoofs, and heard the bark of my shooting-iron. You are mystified—surprised—and not a little startled, perchance? But all roads are free to you, old man, and even now you are safer with Rogue Constance within your house than on the windy side of it. I would be an ill scamp were I ever to bite the hand of him who plucked me from the gallows-fiends. But in the beginning, I was not born to ride o' nights and strip the fat pockets of travelers; I was but a lad when I fell in with a company of rascals who taught me many sleight-of-hand tricks for the mere amusement of the sport.

"It was when my cousin—curse his stars!—poisoned the heart of my father against me to such an extent that I was ordered to leave the old gray house where all my family had been heirs for countless generations; when I was forced from all good company and into bad, that I saw but one road before me—that road have I traveled ever since, the road that leads to a cross-tree with a rope and a—noose!"

Constance seemed to have forgotten his auditor, and Barnes sat still and silent with his big-knuckled hands on either knee.

"Yes," continued Roger, "every bad deed that has ever been ascribed to me, every evil that has befallen me, dates from the day that black-hearted scoundrel had me cast out into the world to beg my bread, or steal it. Then, when my father died, I found I had been disinherited and that *he* had got all that was mine by every right!

"But though I railed and stormed, though I even went so far as to visit the knave in person—I got only a sneering laugh for my answer, and the warning that if I were not out of the county within the hour he would give me over to the law! And that from Quinlan Bidmead, the man who had stolen my shoes and stood up in them to denounce me for the thief he had forced me to become! That from him—but later, something more.

"I was astride my good mare, posted at the angle of a cross-roads in the dark of an

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early Autumn night, when I saw a chaise come by. The act was done and I had held it up ere my glance fell of a sudden upon the arms that emblazoned the doors —the arms of the Constances—my own. The humor of it struck me—to be holding up my own chaise and my own black-faced cousin trembling in stolen elegance! But what held my eyes was the fair beauty of the girl who was seated by his side. They might have had me if they had kept their wits in those few seconds when she held me captive with the wonder of her eyes; it was for her sake that I backed my horse into the ditch and bade the postilions drive on.

"I HEARD afterwards that she was a maid of wondrous beauty and intelligence, albeit of no very high degree —her father, they say, was a trader in the city of London and she had ideas beyond her walk in life; as well she might, dear maid, though, i' faith, it has brought her small comfort. My cousin, it seemed, was crazed with an infatuation for her; she was already his bride and he was taking her secretly back to the home of the Constances when I stopped them at the cross-roads. Then at once he grew a-weary of her and I (being often in those resorts where rogues and vagabonds most do congregate), heard it told that he had bespoke two cut-throat bravos to rid him of a wife he no longer cared for.

"It was my determination then to rescue the lady—for all my misdeeds, there is no blood upon my hands, save what honor called for in the matter of duels, or when an accident occurred on the highroad. And so once more I entered my home, this time secretly, for I know every stick and stone of the old place. Yet for all my caution, for all my good-will, I could find no trace of Quinlan Bidmead's wife—the woman with the hair like brightened copper. But my cousin found *me* and, like the craven cur he is, took me his prisoner and gave me over to the King's men!

"And there, friend, is the story of one poor Roger Constance who for the past weeks or months (for I have quite lost count of time) hath lain in a dungeon at Newgate—until to-day when I was picked like a piece of rubbish from my cell and told that I was to be executed privately and at night—an honor they paid to the reputation of my noble family and that the arms of Quinlan Bidmead might not be besmirched before the public eye. For tongues would wag and heads nod if 'twas known that his own cousin, the wicked Roger, had been hanged like a common sheep-stealer at Tyburn.

"So at nightfall they drove me rapidly to the place of execution—there the rope was placed about my neck. My sins came reeling back upon me like a cloud across the sky—the upturned faces of my persecutors looked, in the darkness, like the waiting shapes that I should see too soon beside the Styx——"

Barnes gasped and stared with awe upon the other, who covered his face with his hands.

"—and there hanged by the neck!" with these words Roger turned down the collar, which up to this moment he had kept close about his throat, and Sheridan Barnes was horrified to see a swollen and discolored mark encircling the white flesh.

"But you are alive?" cried the old man, himself half in doubt.

"Yes, I am alive!" responded the other bitterly. "By the act of God and the carelessness of the hangman or the difficulty of his task in the darkness, I am alive. For when the gallows was left solitary, its ghastly burden swinging back and forth in the storm, there came a pair of sneaking thieves who cut the body down—and with the loosening of the rope and the shock of my fall I recovered consciousness and took to my heels, the robbers, when they recovered their terrified wits, after me. But though I had a good start, they were close upon me when I hurled myself against your door. I fear me Rogue Constance will hold a wider notoriety than ever since they will say that he can not be hanged!" and the man laughed chokingly.

"But surely they will be after you harder than ever? It will scarce be safe for you to venture forth upon the roads just yet, Why, every turnpike will be furnished with a description of you; every toll-man in the country will be on the lookout for such a man as you!" cried Barnes. "Rest here a while; nowhere in the land could you be safer."

But Constance shook his head.

"There is something which you have not understood," he said. "When I looked into the coach that night and beheld my cousin's bride, I beheld the woman whom alone I shall ever have it in my heart to love. Un-

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til I know her to be either safe or dead I must face all—even, if need be, the gallows for a second time. Also, there is the affair of vengeance against the man who has brought me to this pass. Quinlan Bidmead has much to answer for to me and I swear that the hand of death shall never hold me till he has paid for his crimes with his life!"

"And the—the lady who so took your fancy, what name was hers?" inquired the old man after a pause.

Roger sat forward and thrust his hand into the breast of his coat:

"That I do not know—there is nothing to tell me who she was or whence she came, save this glove which I picked up while searching at Greyconstance Grange for her that night when I was taken." As he spoke, he drew forth a little buff-colored riding gauntlet which still curled to the shape of her hand, and held it toward his host.

And for answer the old man started to his feet, quivering and shaking like one in the ague, his watery old eyes fixed upon the glove:

"You—you are sure there can be no mistake? But no, no, I am a fool! There are not two such pairs of gauntlets in the world as these—and I made them for my daughter before she left me—my little Jenny! My little child!" and with a cry the silvered head sank low over the crumpled gauntlet as he sobbed out the story of his loss to Roger Constance.

"And it is even thus that news comes to me—and Jenny, where is she now? Perhaps imprisoned in your cruel cousin's lonely house—perhaps," the old voice trembled to a grating whisper, "perhaps foully murdered!"

Constance rose to his feet.

"And you would have me hide and rest while we still remain in doubt!" he cried. "Why I, too, find my answer here where I found sanctuary. I swear to ride the length and breadth of England, nor shall I see your face again till I have found her whom we both so love—or know her to be beyond our mortal reach!"

In silence, for he was too moved to voice his thoughts, Barnes took the hand of the highwayman in a clasp that told more clearly than words of what was in his heart. And again Roger drew his collar around his thin, pale face as he stepped out into the darkness that precedes the dawn. Through the little grille in the door Sheridan watched him go forth upon his quest, and in the silence of the glover's house tears trickled down his withered face and fell upon the bars that had been drawn to admit a shadowy thief—gallows-fruit that was, after all, to be his friend.

III

A ROOM paneled in carved oak and brilliantly illuminated. No corner remained in obscurity to harbor trick-playing shadows—for the man who was master in Greyconstance had a horror of shadows, though to look at him one would think it hardly possible he could have a horror of anything except, perhaps, himself. He was a sallow, sharp-faced man, this Quinlan Bidmead, with a wig flowing over his shoulders as black as his own heart; thick brows overhung his sunken eyes and his sable suit gave the last sinister touch to an unprepossessing personality. Opposite him, on the other side of the long trestle-table, sat a tiny man in a ginger-green brocade that gave him the semblance of a snake, with eyes as shifty and crafty as his master's.

"And so, my good leech, you have at last prepared a pleasant beverage for my lady wife?" asked Quinlan with a crooked smile twisting his mouth.

The other looked round cautiously before he answered.

"That is what I have done, Master Quinlan," he replied, cringing even while he fawned upon the man in black. "Such a one that hath no taste and leaves no trace—I am proud of it, too, for it is a master-stroke in deadly drugs—one that will take my name down to posterity as the greatest of poison-makers!"

Bidmead laughed brutally.

"So that it prevents that red-haired slut up-stairs from sending *her* name down to posterity as my wife, I care not what it is!" he replied harshly. "Well, Sir Leech, give me this powder or potion or whatever it is, that I may rid myself once and forever of a wench whom I should like to see whipped at the cart's tail. I was a fool to wed her—she hath shrunk from me ever since she heard how I came by Grevconstance, and a few other little tales that meddlers saw fit to make her acquainted with!"

The snake-like little man bent nearer and imparted his instructions as to the giving of

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the drug; and still with the cruel smile upon his lips, Bidmead listened.

"Now hand out the drug, Mr. 'Pothecary," said he at length. "I think that no time can be like the present and I fervently hope that to-morrow will find me a free man, unhampered, unfettered at last."

The leech passed a small vial across the table and into Bidmead's hand. Had any one been present he could scarcely have detected what passed between the two.

"It is certain that my name will not come into discussion should aught come of this night's work?" asked the leech as he rose.

"Have no fear—I am not a bungler. Besides, I have much power and there are many in high places who fear me far more than I fear them," replied the master. And without waiting to hear more, he slunk away and slipped noiselessly through the door. He had scarcely disappeared when a servant entered, bearing a document weighted with an official-looking seal.

"The messenger bade me tell you that he has ridden since yesternight," said the lackey, and departed quickly.

Quinlan Bidmead seemed for a moment to be shaken out of his usual calm, for his hands were far from steady as he spread the parchment out before him; and as he read, his face seemed to shrink and grow sallower; and he shivered.

"So he is dead at last—yet I can not but feel a strange quiver pass across my heart to see my cousin's name writ in the annals of Newgate, for mine was the hand that guided him to his early and ignominious death. Bah! why do I give way to futile and childish thoughts? It was the natural end of such as he chose to be. Those who sin in public must swing in public; Roger was a night-rider, therefore he must have come to it sooner or later. Besides—I need all the nerve I've got to-night. As well have it all over at once—both out of my way, both silent."

His fingers clasped the little bottle that held the deadly drug. He rose and went slowly from the room. Later the lackey, thinking his master had retired for the night, came in and began to extinguish the lights. One by one the little flames died out to smoking wicks under the cap on the end of the servant's wand.

The man pulls aside the heavy curtains and the frosty moon comes streaming down through the heavily leaded windows.

The lackey is gone now and the room still and empty, to all appearances.

Yet from behind one of the heavy curtains a hand creeps out, a head, that even the moonlight can not rob of its hue of copper red, bends cautiously outward, and a slim, dark-robed figure follows and steps out into the room. With her hand to her heart, Jenny crosses to the table. There the document is spread, and it she reads, and as she reads, her last poor fleeting hope is gone and in the silence she hears the knell of her doom toll out.

QUINLAN BIDMEAD was already on his way to the suite of rooms (better might they have been called a prison) allotted to his wife, when he suddenly recalled that he had left the proofs of Roger Constance's execution open to prying eyes. So with a quick intake of the breath, he descended and returned to the paneled room.

He entered and crossed hurriedly to get the parchment. Grasping it, he turned toward the window to make sure that he had taken the right paper. Something urged him to look up.

"Merciful powers, it can not be!" he gasped gutturally, his very breath sticking across his dry throat as he saw the head and shoulders of the man whose death-warrant he held even then in his hand, staring in at him through the window. He drew his hand across his eyes—and when he looked again the face had vanished and only the frosted world drenched in the pale light of the moon lay before him.

"Ha! I'm dreaming—it's the cursed face of that greasy leech that has set my nerves awry!" and he stepped forward to feast his eyes upon the fair meadows that stretched as far as he could see, rime-covered, glistening in silver purity beneath the star-spangled heavens.

"Nay, it is all mine—all mine! I am a fool to fear the night. Roger Constance is dead. I am safe," he repeated. Then, turning quickly, he—came face to face with the man whose name he had that moment uttered. Quinlan staggered back; Roger might have that moment dropped from the gallows at his cousin's feet, for like an avenging spirit, he stood with arms folded across his breast, his eyes unnaturally bright in his pallid, attenuated face, and his cloak

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half off, showing the dark, bluish weal that made a ring round his neck.

"Roger!" he groaned, "Roger—can it indeed be—you?"

"It is Roger Constance," replied the motionless figure.

"Are you going to haunt me in death then as you haunted me in life?"

"I am going to kill you."

Bidmead laughed mirthlessly.

"Ghosts have no power to take life!" replied he.

"In a few moments you will be judge of that!" replied Roger.

"What is it you want? Your lands—your house?"

"Where is Jenny, the glover's daughter?" asked Roger.

"Safe—I mean her no harm, I swear to you not to give her the poison—will that quiet you?"

"Not yet. Go to yonder table and write as I dictate."

Bidmead crossed to the table. Then he wheeled suddenly.

"You are no ghost!" he cried. "What should a spirit do with parchment? A plague on you all! Those rascals at Newgate have played me false! Come into the open, Roger, dear cousin—we'll see if a ghost can feel the bite of steel!" and with a swift movement he whipped his sword from his side and made a lunge at Constance. He would have touched him, too, had not a second figure darted between them and so upset Bidmead's calculations.

"Jenny! Curse you, what are you doing here?" he cried in a fury of passion.

"Leaving the roof of the man who conspired with a common little leech to take my life!" cried the girl. "But I do not go without proofs of that which will convict you of more than one crime—men have gone to Tyburn for less than treason, and that shall send you there. Already the messenger who brought you the notification of Roger Constance's supposed death took back with him a letter which will raise a very hornets' nest when it is read!"

Mouthing horribly, Quinlan sprang toward her.

"By all that's evil, you are a very she-devil! Do you know what you have done? Do you?" he shouted, losing control of himself.

"Yes! It is in return for your having lured me from my home and into marriage with a villain! In return for your never allowing me to communicate with my father; for your keeping me a prisoner in this house—for all that I have suffered at your hands since, like a fool, I ran away with you!"

Bidmead looked round for some way of escape, and again his eyes rested upon Roger.

"Well, what are you waiting like that for, eh, ghost?" he said with impudent irritability.

"When your lady wife has done with you, I am prepared to show you," replied Constance quietly.

Again Bidmead laughed recklessly. His hand crept toward his deep pocket and there closed around the bottle that the leech had given him.

"So you are waiting, both of you? You remind me of vultures!" Now his hand was moving slowly upward over his breast. "You, Jenny, are waiting to send me to Newgate—and you, most amiable cousin, most renowned night-rider, are waiting to run me through! Well, I am vastly grieved to disappoint you——" the bottle was at his lips now and the contents trickling down his throat, "but I prefer death by my own hand to the joy of giving satisfaction to—my—my—enemies,"——his voice trailed off and he staggered back, yet Roger's voice pierced even his consciousness:

"It is the one good act you have ever done, Quinlan, for you have saved our hands from the stain of your blood."

He heard no more after that, save the tinkle of his sword as he fell to the floor.

"I AM to take you back to your father, Mistress Jenny," said Roger, when, later, they stood in a more cheerful apartment.

"Oh, please, please do! I think I hate the very sight of Greyconstance!" she replied with a shiver.

"Some day mayhap you will overcome that aversion—when you remember that it never was Quinlan Bidmead's place, but in its bright days belonged to Roger Constance."

"But are you not afraid? They hanged that bold night-rider once!" she cried.

"But not again. As Master of Greyconstance I think it more than possible I shall receive a pardon from the King," replied Roger.

"And all on account of a wicked cousin!"

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cried Jenny, glancing toward Bidmead's body.

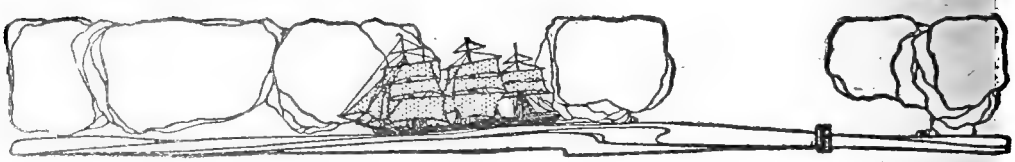
"Say, rather, on account of a sweet lady whom I saw for the first time in my own coach at the cross-roads but a few months ago—the owner of this little glove."

With a cry of delight, the girl reached for it.

"Why, 'tis my little buff gauntlet which I lost some time back! But what's the odds? 'tis a dear little gauntlet and I am glad to have it back."

But Roger returned it to his breast with a quiet smile.

"And so you shall, madame, when I am given the one that matches it, and the hands they both were fashioned for!"



The Sea-Tramp

by

Kenneth Rand

O THE skies are dim and dreary and the days are dull and weary—
If you hark you'll hear the eery wailing of the Autumn-gale;
And there's in my heart a sadness mounting almost to a madness
When the ebbing harbor tide-rip tells its old familiar tale.

Then I hear the sea-wind singing, and the warning fog-bell ringing,
And a whisper comes a-bringing just a dream of Southern sun;
Till my painted picture-islands lift their foamy-footed highlands,
And I find the trail of rapture, ever new and never done!

So I huddle down a-dozing, while the dying coals are posing
As the bloody sunset closing in the furnace of the West;
Then the moon, a ruddy wonder, breaks the velvet night asunder,
And the forefoot springs a-flaming o'er the Highway of Unrest.

Then old faces come to meet me, and old places seem to greet me,
And old enemies to beat me in the fight for gold or fame;
Till my whole mad Youth is standing on the hearth-rug there, demanding
That I give account for wasting it in folly and in shame!

Though you be no kin, O Brother, dearer are you than another,
Blooded by the world-old Mother to the Ocean's sorcery;
Though old bones may never bear it, yet old hearts will ever dare it,
Look! the harbor-lights are dimming—Let's beat to open sea!

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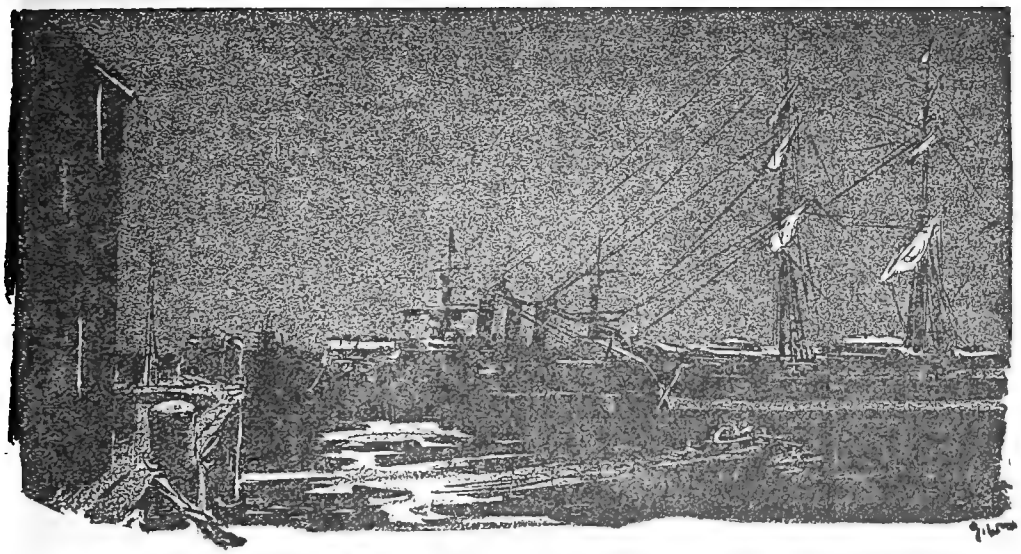

A VIOLATION OF THE STATUTES

By H. D. COUZENS

"THE trouble with that man," said Mr. Davis, "is that he's unscrupulous. He ain't honest and he don't keep within the law; and us fellows that do, have to suffer."

"The trouble with that guy," said the laconic Mr. Rook, "is that he's as big a crook as you are, Larry; and there ain't enough business to go around."

The partners were seated in a corner of the Last Chance Saloon discussing a business matter of importance. A number of tall ships were in Honolulu Harbor, many of them short-handed, and able seamen were exceedingly scarce. Head-money had advanced to a point that made Mr. Rook lick his thin lips in the manner of a cat exploring a cream-jug, but in addition to the dearth of seamen there were competitive interests abroad.

Time was when they had had the field to themselves, but there had recently sailed into view a low, rakish craft in the person of one Dan MacManus, armed and equipped with full knowledge of the devious ways of the "shipping-master's" art. He had plied his profession on the cruel Barbary Coast of San Francisco till a suspicion of his connection with a certain grim tragedy of the water-front had made advisable a prolonged absence from the State of California. He had therefore transferred his energies to Hawaii, a provisional government at the time, and had proved, from the first, a formidable rival.

In the innumerable clashes between the competitors for the water-front trade honors had been even till MacManus scored a point by a gross violation of professional ethics. This was the unpardonable crime of decoying a middle-aged and very competent seaman from their boarding-house to his own by offering superior attractions at a merely nominal sum, taking good care thereafter that his boarder kept in such condition as to be beyond the counter-wiles of the partners. In the face of the demand for men, the sailor still sojourned with MacManus, for a very good reason—he still had money. It was only a matter of hours, or days at most, when this, with the addition of a month's advance in wages, would be carefully secreted about the person of Mr. MacManus, and the elderly seaman again toiling on the high seas for his daily bread. Rook and Davis considered this high-handed act a gross insult and were naturally indignant. Aside from this, they had immediate use for the seaman.

"I tell you it's no use beating him up,"

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said Davis, replying to a suggestion from his partner. "It would be a clear case against us; can't you see that, you bloodthirsty ruffian? It's me having a head on my shoulders that keeps you from serving time. Now Section 3124 of the Penal Code——"

"Aw, shut up!" said Rook.

He rose and walked restlessly to the rear and then back again, looking at his watch. The Last Chance Saloon was closed to the general public through the lateness of the hour, but the partners had ready access through the rear door.

"This ain't no time to talk," said Mr. Rook. "Somethin's got to be done. It's half-past one, and if them men ain't aboard the *Annie Crawford* by daylight we don't get our money. We've got to get out and rustle up two A. B's or go to the old man and tell him we can't. Come on, Larry!"

Davis finished his drink and they passed out into the night. They were keen for any prey that might suit their needs, but at this hour, with the brief time at their disposal, the problem of finding two or more able seamen and shipping them, by fair means or foul, seemed a remote chance. They had relied on the sailor now abiding with MacManus as a sheet-anchor to windward in just such an emergency, and his defection had left them barren of resources.

They turned down Fort Street to the wharves, silent, shambling and disconsolate, but keenly alert. The British cruiser *Hypatia*, lately in from China ports and aglow with lights, was anchored in the roadstead, and near her lay the *Annie Crawford*, a full-rigged ship, her sails loosely clewed up by the buntlines, her spars painted a light gray and looking quite ghostly in the moonlight.

As they passed under the glare of an electric light a man stood in the shadow of a wharf. He had just hailed one of the boatboys, but, seeing them, shrank deeper into the shadow, and, as they walked on, dismissed the boat and stole silently along in their wake. There were few loungers about. The wharves were deserted save by the watchmen.

A belated hack, bearing two officers of the *Hypatia* who had been dining ashore, drove to a boat-stand, discharged its white-clad passengers, wheeled round and was lost in obscurity. Rook and Davis walked on past the Naval Wharf and the Marine Railway and turned inland at the foot of Punchbowl Street.

"It's hard luck, Frank," said Davis, "but it will be our turn next. We'll run this Barbary Coast pirate out of town."

"Oh, yes," said Rook, "but what we want now is a couple of men before daylight, and by the lord Judas we're going to get 'em if I have to bite somebody in the neck!"

THEY rounded a turn in the road as he spoke and out of the ensuing silence caught the sound of a high, piping voice raised in song:

"Oh, there was a young sye-lor from Liverpool Town;
Wye! Hye! (*hic*) Blow the man down!"

A few yards ahead, clinging fondly to a telephone post, was the singer. He was a lone sailor, clad in the tropical uniform of the British Navy, and this, with the insignia *H. B. M. S. Hypatia* on the ribbon of his wide-brimmed straw hat proclaimed him one of the crew of the cruiser in the harbor. They paused and surveyed the inebriate curiously; then the eyes of each sought those of his partner. Those of Davis wore a startled expression, while Rook's were gleaming and his thin lips set grimly. A sudden stupendous thought had struck them simultaneously. The sailor continued to sing and presently the deep and not unpleasing tones of Davis's voice joined in the time-worn chantey:

"Blow the man down; oh, blow the man down!
Give me some time to blow the man down!"

"My eye, shipmyte!" said the sailor, as he paused for breath; "you 'ave a voice like a bloomin' dickey-bird. Let's 'ave a wet!"

Arm in arm the three strolled up the street when suddenly, around a dark corner, there swung the slight figure of a young man in the uniform of a midshipman. He was humming a little tune, but at sight of the trio he brought up short and his young features hardened to a look of sternness. The sailor stiffened and saluted awkwardly.

"Hum!" said the officer; "overstayed shore leave, eh——"

He got no further, for Mr. Rook, with a snort of rage, leaped forward and smote him on the jaw. The middie fell in a crumpled heap. The sailor stood aghast at this outrage to his officer till he felt the firm grasp of the Herculean Davis on his arm

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and was swiftly propelled into a dark side street.

"This way, mate," said Davis. "Come along, old chap, or he'll see you. We'll take care of you!"

They hurried on, the sailor bewildered and very unsteady on his legs. Presently Rook left them and returned on his tracks. Behind a friendly jog in the fence he paused and peered forth cautiously.

The middie had rolled to a sitting posture and another man was tenderly assisting him to his feet. As the face of the latter turned for a moment to the light of the street-lamp, Rook saw the rugged, adamantine countenance of Mr. Dan MacManus. Rejoining his companions, he assisted his partner, with what rough grace he had at command, in reassuring the horrified sailor and herding him in the direction of their boarding-house. He did not refer to what he had seen.

"My eye!" said the sailor, as they reached the boarding-house; "wotever am I going to do?"

He was in great distress and very much fuddled, but the persuasive eloquence of Davis combined with a large number of drinks finally convinced him that he was safe in the hands of loyal and honorable friends. He even essayed a snatch of song, but at this point a final drink was prepared and administered by Davis, the ingredients of which are immaterial. The song died in a feeble diminuendo, and soon afterward a perfectly good sailor's uniform went, in the form of smoke, up the chimney of the boarding-house kitchen.

Half an hour later the erstwhile man-o'-war's man, clad in a rough outfit of merchant seaman's togs, was snoring peacefully in a hack in transit to the good ship *Annie Crawford*, over whose bows he was tenderly lifted from a small boat.

It was the mate who inspected him by the light of a lantern. "All right," said he, after fruitless efforts to arouse the slumberer; "I see you've brought a man, but in the shape he's in now how in Sam Hill am I to know whether he's an A. B. or not? The old man don't want any more lame ducks."

Davis rolled up the sailor's sleeve. On the forearm, among other emblems, was a large figure of a rather indecorous female clinging to an anchor, done in red and blue ink. Underneath was the motto: "In God We Trust." Through the opening of his shirt several similar designs were visible and the mate nodded his head.

"He'll do," said he. "Don't forget we need another man or two."

By the light of the lantern a pen in the inert fist was induced to subscribe a cross to the articles, and "John Jones, able-bodied seaman" was written in the proper place. This simple formality concluded strictly according to law, the partners left the ship.

II

A WHILE later they sat in the Last Chance Saloon. Rook, the short-sighted and combative, was optimistic, but the face of Larry Davis wore an anxious look. As the master mind of the combination he was fully aware of the gravity of the situation which his partner held so lightly.

"Go on! Laugh, you thick-headed, strong-arm butcher!" said he. "I'll laugh with you when I see the *Annie Crawford* beatin' up for Molokai Channel!"

"If it wasn't for your streak of yellow," said Rook, "you'd be a pretty good man, Larry! It's on account of that I didn't tell you about MacManus."

"What about MacManus?"

"Why, when I ran back that time, who do you suppose was there, brushing off the little lime-juice officer? MacManus—no less!"

"*What?*" cried Davis.

"Sure! He must have seen the whole thing, but what of it? Ain't the man safe aboard the *Crawford?* MacManus don't know that! What do we care?"

Davis half rose from his seat, gazing at his partner with a look of horror. Then he subsided into a limp mass and sat gaping. His huge hand gripped a tumbler and he poured a triple dose of spirit with shaking fingers and gulped it down. Then he found speech.

"Why, you—mutton-headed superstructure of a human being! You anthropoid—you—you—by heavens, do you know what we've done?" He rose, kicked a cuspidor across the room and approached his partner threateningly. "Why didn't you tell me? Why, we're not only amenable to the Civil Law for assault, but to the laws of Great Britain by extradition under the

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International Code! We're up again' it! Do you hear that, you ignorant wharf-rat? There's only one thing to be done and that's take to the hills and hide out till this lime-juicer has gone."

"See here, Larry," said Rook earnestly. "It ain't so bad as all that. MacManus nor no one else knows what we did with that sailor, else we'd have had a file of marines on us before now. The man's safe, I tell you; but it's up to us to do for MacManus. Then we'll get another man for the *Crawford* and get the bonus money. Maybe we can get this man Hennessey. What?"

Hennessey was the seaman who had been decoyed away by MacManus.

Davis sat silent for a while, thinking deeply. Then a startled look came over his face similar to the expression it had worn when they found the sailor singing in the road. "Frank," said he. "this here MacManus, now. He's been a sailor, hasn't he?"

"He was mate of a sealer out of Seattle for years."

Davis looked at his partner meaningly, a dark flush overspreading his face. Then he poured himself a final drink, his hand shaking a trifle.

"Come on; let's hike!" said he.

III

IN THE partnership agreement between Rook and Davis there were many codes, none the less binding because unwritten. These had been formulated and were rigidly adhered to, not so much as a matter of corporate honor as of self-preservation. One of these codes forbade the carrying of lethal weapons while about their daily business. They were often in the police court and sometimes underwent the indignity of being searched, and the presence of deadly weapons under the circumstances would have been inconsistent with their usual rôle of injured innocence.

Another thing that influenced the astute Mr. Davis in framing this law was the uncertain temper of his partner. Expressed with fists alone, it often served a useful purpose, but a man of belligerent and irritable nature who carries weapons is prone to use them, and Davis, who preferred the safe side in any matter, shrank from the idea of unnecessary murder in connection with his profession.

Davis himself wore in a handy pocket or, when occasion pressed, strapped to his wrist by a leather thong, a small contrivance of braided rawhide containing in the business end a couple of tablespoonfuls of bird-shot. Such a weapon was effective without being fatal and could easily be slipped from the wrist and dropped in the gutter without attracting undue notice. Rook was without weapons save those of nature.

MacManus's boarding-house was only a few blocks away. They approached it cautiously, for, although it was quite dark, they were in the enemy's territory. A single light was burning in a small room at the rear. The curtain was drawn, but it lacked at least two inches of meeting the sill and through this space there was an unobstructed view of the room. The window was open and nothing intervened but a mosquito-screen.

They crept close and peered through. The old sailor, Hennessey, sat on a chair in the corner, tilted back against the wall. Within reach of his hand was a black bottle and a tumbler from which he frequently refreshed himself. MacManus sat at a small table, a sheet of paper before him on which he was writing with the stub of a pencil. The process seemed to cause him exquisite anguish, for he rolled his eyes, chewed his tongue and writhed painfully in the throes of composition. When, after many erasures and much groping for inspiration, the missive was completed, he folded it carefully and placed it in a soiled envelope which he sealed and addressed. Then he turned to the seaman.

"Hennessey," said he sharply, "are ye sober, now?"

Hennessey hastily gulped down half a tumbler of spirit which he was holding to his lips and brought the chair down with a thump. "I am!" said he, with a slight hiccough.

MacManus took the bottle, placed it in a cupboard against the wall and locked the door.

"Ye have enough!" said he; "but I guess ye'll do. No more of *that* till ye get back! Take this note. Go down to the wharf and take a boat to the *Hypatia*. They won't let ye aboard, but see that that note gets to the man it's addressed to, Midshipman Harry Carpenter. He'll be on the lookout

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for ye; and man, as ye value your life, don't leave go of that note, and don't stop for nothing till ye see it safe in his hands. Hennessey, ye're a good man! I trust ye as I would me own brother! Will ye, in heaven's name, be careful?"

"Ay, ay, Mac! You can trust me. Shall I pay the boat-boy with my own money?"

MacManus gave him a dollar, opened the door and they passed out together.

"Come back when you're through, Hennessey," said MacManus on the threshold. "I'll be on watch for ye. Be off now. I'm going to the Marshal's."

They parted, the sailor walking rapidly toward the wharves and MacManus to the upper part of town, but they did not go alone. Some distance behind the sailor the form of Mr. Rook glided in and out of the shadows, and Davis stalked along in the wake of the unconscious MacManus.

The sailor strode on, a slight roll to his gait, humming a tune from which the element of melody was totally lacking. He passed into the shadow of the coal-sheds and here paused for a moment, testing with his foot to see whether an exceptionally dark spot was a pool of water, and at this instant something terrific struck him like a blast and he fell forward on his face. The black spot was not water, but the sailor was past caring.

Rook knelt down and abstracted the letter, which he placed in his own pocket. He then made a further search of Hennessey's person, taking what money he found. There was a money-belt containing several gold coins which he removed without compunction and strapped about his own waist beneath his vest. In justice to Rook it may be said that his object was not so much larceny as the furtherance of a plan hastily whispered by Davis as they stood by MacManus's window. Hennessey, penniless, would probably return to their own fold, in which case they might return him his money—or they might not.

MACMANUS walked with a jaunty swing to his shoulders. He was a formidable creature, heavily muscled and almost as tall as Davis himself. Davis felt his courage ebbing, for he did not relish fighting, at least upon terms as nearly even as he was now to face. However, the case was desperate. If MacManus got to the Marshal's with his story, there would be short shrift for the firm of Rook and Davis. He had reached this conclusion without realizing that his footsteps on the stone flagging were quite audible, when MacManus turned and saw him. He assumed an air of nonchalance and approached MacManus, who immediately backed against a wall.

"A fine night, Mac!" said he.

"Humph! Is it now? What do ye want? I know ye, Larry Davis; out with it!"

"Nothing. I'm out for a stroll, that's all. Suppose we walk on together."

"We will not! I'm on business, Mr. Davis. Ye'll stroll by yourself. The road is free, Mr. Davis, and ye may go on or go back for all I care, but ye'll do one or the other —— quick!"

"See here, Mac! I know the business you're on. You'll drop it, do you hear? You'll drop it or you'll be made to!"

"And who'll make me?"

"I will!"

"Then you're a better man than I thought. Stand aside, ye murderin' thief, or I'll——"

He finished the sentence by stepping forward and striking Davis in the face. The big man staggered back and MacManus was about to follow up his advantage when there was a sound of running footsteps close at hand and he unwisely turned his head in that direction. It was his undoing. The long arm of Davis swung forward, the blackjack struck MacManus behind the ear, and he fell like a log.

Rook came up on the run, quite out of breath. He looked at the fallen MacManus.

"You got him just in time!" he panted; "I saw him poke you, you big lobster! Whistle for José!"

Davis uttered a peculiar whistle, and a hack which had hovered in their wake appeared mysteriously out of the shadow, driven by a Portuguese with rings in his ears. They lifted MacManus into the vehicle.

"José," said Davis, "drive down to the wharf."

Things were stirring aboard the *Annie Crawford*, for the first streaks of dawn were visible on the horizon. Sails were flapping free and they were manning the capstan as Rook and Davis stepped aboard with their unconscious burden. The Captain was on deck and came to inspect this last member of his crew.

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"Humph!" said he; "don't you fellows ever ship a man who isn't knocked out cold? Do you think this is a hospital ship? Who's this man? Seems to me I've seen him before."

"I think not, sir," said Davis. "He's only a poor fellow, down on his luck. He's been drinking, of course; they all do, poor devils——"

"Oh, stow that! Is this man a seaman? That's all I want to know."

Davis felt in the bosom of MacManus's shirt. A sailor who has papers usually wears them next his skin. The search was rewarded by a packet covered with oil-skin hung from a necklace of marline. The evidence being satisfactory and the recruit "signed on" with the same despatch that the British tar had been, the Captain paid the partners the bonus due and, wishing him a prosperous voyage, they pulled ashore.

They stood on the string-piece of the wharf, however, till the fussy tug had pulled the ship clear of the bar and, with yards braced and sails filled, she was well started on her long voyage. Then their faces cleared and they solemnly shook hands.

"A good night's work, Frank!" said Davis.

IV

IN THE rear room of their boarding-house the partners were awaiting breakfast. The Chinese cook bustled about, rattling pans and dishes, and there was a pleasant sputtering of frying eggs from the little kitchen. Davis held a tall glass filled with cracked ice into which he carefully introduced the ingredients of cocktails for two. Then, clapping a silver shaker over all, he finished the process in the usual manner. Rook, puffing a short pipe, sat at the table in his shirt-sleeves studying a crude scrawl on a sheet of paper which he had just taken from a soiled envelope.

Rook was not a handwriting expert; the scrawl offered problems quite beyond him, and as Davis filled two glasses from the shaker he tossed the note across the table.

"Here," said he, "you're the professor of the family; what do you make of them spider-tracks?"

Davis read the note aloud:

"Midshipman Harry Carpenter, esq.,
Abord H. M. S. *Hypatia.*
Honored sir:

I just found what those fellers done with yore Jackie they shiped him on bord a ship lying close to yorn to wit the *Annie Crawford* the dirty scoundrels. I herd this from the boat boys who trusts me and has no use for them sharks same being a very bad lot and a disgrace to the perfession. You can get yore man away without no trouble but he was unsensible when took abord from those helions work so you will have to serch for him in the bunks. You can make a good case again these men and I hope they will be sent up for a long time if not for life which they diserve the dam rascals they done you a dirty deal. I wish you luck.

Respt. yores,
Daniel McManus."

Davis chuckled as he tore the note to bits and shoved Rook his cocktail across the table.

"We had a narrow squeak, Frank. If this artistic dockyment had been delivered, that flannel-mouth would have had us where he wanted. And now mark you this, Frank—we run afoul of no more statutes. Hereafter this business will be run strictly according to law. We're well out of a bad mess. Here's luck!"

A strange *pat-patting* sound was audible on the road outside, momentarily growing louder until it resolved itself into the rhythmic tread of marching men. They sprang to the window and looked out. Half-a-dozen sailors, looking very business-like in leggings and watch-caps, and armed with Lee-Metford rifles, were marching sturdily up the street! Beside them, slightly in advance, very erect and stern, was a slight, white-clad figure which they had no difficulty in recognizing as that of the young middie of the night before. Opposite the house they halted while the officer appeared to jot down something with a pencil.

Then he gave a sharp command and the little squad went padding up the street. Davis sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Rook turned with a twisted grin.

"Well, well!" said he; "the little sailor-lad must know we live here. Maybe when he ain't giving his flat-feet an airing he'll drop in to tea——"

Davis arose and towered over his partner, his brow black with wrath.

"Shut up!" he bellowed. "There ain't nothing in that skull of yours but gravel, and when it rattles you think it's language! Oh, if I only had a partner with a head instead of a cast-iron bull-dog! Why, your

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head's a piece of junk! It's——" he fell into wordless sputtering.

Rook, in no way disturbed, waited till the fit subsided. "Well," said he calmly, "what is it? Drop the jawbone stuff and talk sense!"

"It's a warrant, you low-browed simian! A warrant for you and me! He's after us. He stopped to get the number and he'll be back—oh, yes, he'll be back; and then what?" He sank back, pale and shaking, into the chair. Rook, too, looked uneasy.

THERE was a soft knocking at the door. For a moment they sat facing each other, frozen to stone. Then Davis, with an extreme effort, gained control of himself, rose to his feet and walked firmly to the door. It was the sailor, Hennessey, much disheveled and with a wild look in his eye. He stood on the threshold, plainly embarrassed, spat over his shoulder, coughed once or twice and hitched uncomfortably; yet he appeared bursting with speech. The color came slowly back to Davis's face and he sighed with relief.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Hennessey," said he. "What is it, my dear man? Speak up!"

"Why—why, I'm in trouble, sir. You see, I've been stopping with MacManus——"

"Yes, yes! We know that, Hennessey, and mighty ungrateful of you after the kindness we done you."

"Yes, sir. And now I'm up against a lee shore all on account of it. Last night—" the sailor gulped painfully, "last night I left Mac's on a—on a errand, so to speak. I meant no harm to nobody. Down by the coal-sheds somebody come up behind and bumped me off. They took my money—and something else—a bit of a note it was—very important. I don't dast to meet Mac without that note, and owing him money and all. He'd kill me out o' hand. So I thought maybe you two gentlemen—" he cleared his husky throat—"I thought maybe you knew of a ship——"

"You poor fellow!" said Davis kindly. "Walk right in and sit down. Here, take a drink and some breakfast. Then we'll all go over to see MacManus."

"No, no!" cried Hennessey. "I got it rough last night. If Mac sees me he'll finish the job. Let me rest awhile and then, if there's a ship, give me a chance. You'll get the advance."

Rook glowered at the seaman in no friendly fashion as he wolfed down ham and eggs, but Davis walked up and down the room excitedly, and as he walked, the shadow gradually faded from his great bland face. Suddenly he banged his fist violently on the table.

"I have it, by gracious!" said he. "Hennessey, you wanted a ship and you're going to have it, and there won't be no question of advance about it either."

"What ship is it, and when does she sail?"

"The *Annie Crawford.* She's sailed already."

The sailor's mouth gaped. "The *Crawford!* Why—why——"

"Never mind the rest. Be ready as soon as you've swallowed that coffee. Come, now, Hennessey, don't sit there gawping like a gooney. This is a quick turn, but it's a favor to you. Now do as I say and it's a favor to me and my partner, too."

The sailor leaned forward with his arms on the table and a look of extreme cunning came into his eyes.

"A favor to you, says you. Well, gents, I'm a poor man. My outfit's gone. It's at MacManus's, and slops cost money. Of course I'm willin', as it's a favor to you, but—but——"

Davis saw that he had made a mistake, but it was no time for parleying:

"Yes, yes, it's a favor and we'll stake you to a few dollars, but don't sit fooling away time."

The sailor licked his lips and his crafty eyes roved uneasily from one to the other.

"Last night," said he, "I was robbed of sixty-three dollars and fifty cents!"

Davis turned to the safe where, forgotten on a shelf, lay Hennessey's own money. He counted the amount over and handed it to the sailor.

"Now, you thieving swab, clear out! And, Frank, if this old party here makes a false move, kill him!"

He gave his partner whispered instructions. Rook's face slowly cleared as he listened.

"Now," concluded Davis, "make no mistake about this and let that old fool give you the slip. It's our only chance. I'll stay here and face the music; and now clear out!"

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V

FIVE minutes later there was another knock at the door, this time loud and imperious. Outside stood the file of sailors, a deputy marshal and the midshipman. Without ceremony the officer shoved the door open and stepped inside. He looked sternly at Davis, who felt something like a cold wave go over him.

"You're Davis, I take it, and your partner's name is Rook. A sweet pair you are! Where is my man?"

"Your man? What man do you mean?"

"Don't beat about with me! Out with it, or it's double-quick, tramp, march! with you and your partner. One of you struck me last night and I have reason to believe you have hidden a deserter from the British Navy. I've a civil warrant here for you. I don't suppose you know how serious the matter is, but you're going to find out!" His jaw set grimly.

Davis was quaking inwardly, but he maintained a bold front.

"I don't pretend not to know what you mean," said he, "but you've got it all wrong, sir. We haven't broken any laws; I know them too well for that. I'm not speaking of what happened to you, sir. That's a civil matter and I can see you're too square a man to make a public fuss over a little rap on the jaw"—the middie winced—"and as for that sailor-man, he's out on the high seas now or I'm much mistaken."

"What? You mean——"

"I mean this: that I believe your man was shanghaied, being drunk as he was, and shipped aboard a merchant vessel by a crimp named MacManus—a big Irishman with heavy eyebrows and a blue jaw. He's a bad lot. Maybe you know him, sir."

The middie started. "Good Lord!" he muttered.

"Yes, sir. My partner and me are simple hotel-keepers. We found your man last night in a bit of trouble—some Kanaka row or other. He asked us to put him up for the night. He was scared and, when you came along, started to run. My partner, not seeing you very well in the dark thought you was one of the Kanakas and interfered out of sympathy for the poor devil; and sorry I am he did, me knowing you now for an officer and a gentleman."

"Get on!" said the middie impatiently. "Get to the point. Where's Cogswell?"

"Well, sir, when we got here and heard his story we wouldn't take him in. Having overstayed his leave, he was a deserter, and the penalty for harboring deserters in Statute Three Thousand and——"

"Get on, man! The deuce with your statutes!"

"Well, he left and we followed to see he didn't come to no harm. This fellow MacManus picks him up and takes him to his place. After a while he came out with your man all dressed different, put him in a hack and drove to the water-front, us following. This was only a few hours ago. We were too late to interfere, being on foot, but we saw him take your man aboard and come back alone."

Davis paused and wiped his brow with a bandanna handkerchief. His hands trembled and his knees shook. There was a strain in the telling of this mendacious narrative, and there was a cold, hard glint to the barrels of the rifles carried by the sailors.

"Now, sir," he continued, "when I saw this, what did I do? I saw at once what a heenyus thing this crook MacManus had done. It was a violation of the statutes as plain as ever I saw. He has done us more than one dirty trick and we owed him for that, so at my own expense I chartered a launch and sent my partner after the ship to get your man by hook or crook. It would help us square accounts with MacManus, you see, and then, sir—maybe I'm wrong, of course, but—well, it occurred to me that there might be a bit of a reward——"

The middie looked puzzled. He was too young to have had much experience in executive matters. He turned to the deputy marshal:

"Do you suppose what this man says is true?" he asked.

The deputy grinned:

"I wouldn't believe Larry Davis if he swore on a stack of Bibles as high as Punchbowl Hill."

"Thanks!" said the middie. "Now, my man," he turned to Davis, "what you say sounds plausible, but you heard what this gentleman said, so first I'll just have a search made of these premises and then you'll come along with me and prove what you say is true—and Heaven help you if it isn't!"

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VI

THE *Annie Crawford* was reaching on a long slant through the Molokai Channel. She was making slow progress, as there was little wind and a heavy cross sea. The mate stood by the taffrail, scanning the great spread of sail critically, ready to take advantage of every puff. From far astern he heard a hailing voice and, glancing in that direction, saw a small launch rapidly overhauling the ship. Still farther in the distance was a speck of white topped by a gleam of red. He turned the glass upon it and made it out another launch bearing a British Naval ensign. A man in the bow of the first launch shouted wildly and waved his hat.

The mate called the skipper, who stood a short distance away. "What do you make of that, sir?" said he.

The skipper spat overboard.

"Somebody's in a —— of a hurry, said he; "give me the glass. Hello!" he cried suddenly; "blowed if it ain't that crimp! And the other's a Navy launch overhauling him. Something's stirring, Mr. Caypless!"

A quarter of an hour later the foremost launch ran alongside and in response to frantic appeals from Rook, a rope was lowered by which he climbed to the deck, followed by Hennessey.

"Cap'n," said he, "there's been a mistake. One of your men aboard is a deserter from the British Navy."

"What!" roared the Captain. "What the Sam Hill is that to me? You shipped him, didn't you? Go ashore and take the consequences and don't come interfering here. Get off my ship!"

Rook pointed astern.

"Here comes the British Navy. There's trouble in sight for somebody. I've brought you another man. He's sober. Give me that other one, quick, and I'll take him ashore."

The Captain stormed and swore, but the *Annie Crawford* was an English ship and he saw endless trouble with the authorities and his owners. In the end Cogswell, still stupid and befuddled, was haled forth and lowered into the launch.

Meantime, a disheveled figure, dazed and blinking, crawled from the forecastle and gazed vacantly about. He was promptly cuffed by the mate, which seemed in a measure to restore his reason. He glanced at Koko Head off astern, and Molokai, looming into view on the other hand, and sprang to the rail.

"Shanghaied, by thunder!" he roared. He saw the launch just casting off and the grinning face of Rook upturned to his. "I guess we did for you, Mac!" said Rook.

MacManus raved like a man insane. He leaped on the rail and was about to spring overboard when a strong hand caught him by the collar, yanked him to the deck, and he disappeared in the midst of a violent scuffle, to be seen no more.

As the launch sputtered back toward the harbor the other, in which were Davis, the midshipman, the deputy marshal and a couple of armed sailors, ranged alongside and the two boats ran together to the Naval Wharf. Davis sat silent all the way, his eye upon the sailor, Cogswell, in apprehension; but to his relief, Cogswell was limp and apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

The middie hopped briskly to the wharf.

"Step up here, everybody!" said he. "Take charge of Cogswell, you men," to the sailors. "Mr. Davis, I believe I owe you and your friend an apology and thanks for your help which I may need again when I get hold of the right man. Now Cogswell, brace up! Do you remember the man who shanghaied you?"

Cogswell straightened up, saluted in a sickly fashion and looked around stupidly. Suddenly his face brightened and he pointed to Rook and Davis.

"Them men there!" said he.

Midshipman Harry Carpenter glanced from one to the other, his boyish face a study of conflicting emotions. Rook looked sheepish, and for once the voluble Davis was dumb. The middie turned to the sailors.

"Take Cogswell aboard and put him in the brig!" said he.

As the launch went puffing across the harbor he stood for a while in deep thought. The situation was clear to him now, and, if it became publicly known, he was in for much chaffing from the older officers. He spoke to the deputy marshal, who moved off up the wharf. There was no one near save a Kanaka boat-boy resting idly on his oars, awaiting a fare. The middie turned to Rook and Davis and grinned.

"I guess you know what I can do with you when Cogswell sobers up," said he.

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"But I'm not going to do it. You seem to have had a bally lot of trouble without getting much out of it, and we'll cry quits on that part. But"—he stepped toward them and his jaw shot out—"I've got another score to settle. Which of you men hit me?"

"I did," said Rook.

"Put up your hands!"

Rook complied, but the middie was too quick for him. His fist caught Rook on the jaw. Rook staggered back, his heel struck the string-piece and he toppled over backward into the water. The middie straightened his blouse deliberately.

"There!" said he to Davis. "We'll call the account square now!" and whistling a tune he sprang lightly into the Kanaka's boat and put off for the *Hypatia*.

As for Dan MacManus, he was never seen again in Honolulu.

THE CHECHACKO

By

GEORGE ALLEN ENGLAND

WITH an uncertain fumbling at the latch, a groan of the hinges, the door of the desolate, snow-sieged *barrabora* creaked open. In staggered a man.

One moment he stood there on the sill, powdered with frozen snow, while a fine, hissing drive sifted swirling all about him—the strangest figure those three disheartened prospectors had ever gazed upon.

Silhouetted against the Arctic gloom, they saw his gaunt and hunger-bitten outlines. Spite of torn *mukluks*, loose-bagging *parka* and bearskin hood, something about him told them on the instant he was a Chechacko, a tenderfoot.

"What the——?" began Grilk, wheeling about on his cracker-box. Coonrod sprang to his feet with an oath. "Doc" Henderson, instinctively reaching back toward his Colt, stared in amaze.

Out trembled the stranger's hands to them. Then forward he tottered to the floor with a hoarse and wordless gulp.

Ghastly his face was, frost-burned and white of lip; beneath the fringe of his hood they saw a blood-stiffened bandage. His chin lost itself in a furze of black beard, unkempt and stark. But in his rheumy eyes, reddened with snow-ophthalmia, glowed a living flame of passion and of triumph. The shaking hands, exultant, strove to convey some vast, portentous news.

"What—what is it?" shouted Coonrod. "Who——?"

The stranger's mouth worked. A choked cry, gasping and horrible, burst forth.

"Eureka!" croaked the specter. "God! I've—struck it—rich! Saved! I—I'll share—with—with you—and——"

All at once the light faded from those awful eyes of famine and of pain. Down dropped the arms. The head snapped forward. As though the springs of his whole being were broken, the Chechacko fell.

Even before Doc Henderson could reach

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him, he had crumpled into a grotesque, an out-sprawled thing there on the rough planks of the floor.

"Th' hooch, you, quick!" shouted Henderson. With his hunting-knife, snatched from the table, he slit up the ragged *parka* and thrust his hand into the stranger's breast.

"Hooch, Grilk! Quick, that bottle, there —or he—we'll lose him! *Quick!*"

A big tumbler of the stuff, forced neat between set teeth (they had to pry the jaws apart with the knife-blade), presently set the Chechacko's heart going again.

Then they stripped him, wondering compassionately at his rags, more like a native "husky's" dress than a white man's; commiserating his emaciated, rib-staring body; filled with stern pity at sight of those frozen, lacerated feet. With snow they chafed his burns; they bathed them tenderly with kerosene and wrapped them with soft, oil-soaked cloths. Their extra shirts they gave unhesitatingly to this service. Into Coonrod's bunk they packed him, buried to the neck in furs. To him they gave a little, a very little indeed, of venison broth strained from the kettle on the stove.

Before the brief gloom that marked the November day had given place to the black, snow-driven darkness of night over the tremendous desolation of the muskegs, they knew the man would live.

"Yes," Doc assured the other two, as—seated about the stove again, with pipes—they watched him sleep in the dim lamp-shine and listened to the soughing weariness of his breath, "yes, he'll pull through, now. But speaking of close calls—what?"

Grilk nodded gravely, a hulk of an Ozark man, red-bearded, loose of joint. With a horny thumb he tamped the glowing heel of tobacco in his pipe:

"You goin' fer to fix his haid right soon?"

"No," answered the Doctor. "Not now. It's not bleeding any to speak of. Sleep's best. To-morrow's time enough."

Silence a while, and smoke that coiled among the shadows of the roof-poles. Silence, save for the chatter of the tin clock and the brawl of the blizzard against the moss-chinked logs. Then said Coonrod—lean, nervous little "Coony" from West Virginia:

"Who-all yuh reckon he is, anyhow? An' whar from, an' why?"

Henderson shook his head. "I pass," answered he. "When he comes out of it, we'll know. Not till then."

"That's sure some cur'us remarks he makes, jest afore he draps," suggested Grilk, voicing a common sentiment. "That 'ar Yew-reeker biz, an' all. I'd kind a——"

He hesitated, not knowing how to finish.

"About all *I* can see," resumed the Doctor, "is that he's in bad. Seems to have gone the limit, and then some. Must have had what you fellows call a deal from the bottom. But as for his private affairs, I don't see that they particularly concern us."

"You go hang!" rumbled the Missourian. "Ef I took any stock in it, I'd sure like fer to know what he's drivin' at. But you kain't never tell. Prob'ly plumb locoed. They mostly every one choctaws that-a-way when they're all in."

"Mebbe. Mebbe not," spoke up the Southerner. His eyes were beginning to glow uneasily. A taut silence fell.

Then after a little pause, up spoke the huge red-beard, with sovereign directness.

"Why not frisk his freight," said he, "an' see ef he's packin' any pay-dirt? Find out ef he's got the color in any of his kicks, hey?"

The Doctor frowned.

"No," objected he, decisively. "That wouldn't be exactly on the level."

"But he says, he *says*," insisted Grilk, "he 'lows as how he's goin' snucks with us! Lets on he's struck a bo-nanza, an'——"

"I vote we-all looks an' sees what he's a-totin'," interrupted Coonrod. "I ain't hipped none on pryin', but this heah's a case o' have-to! Shorty, he's with me. That's two t' one, Doc, an' you's plumb in the my-nority. So can it, Doc! Can it; cut it out!"

"I object!" cried Henderson, springing to his feet. "That may be Sourdough ethics, but it's rotten wrong! Forget it!"

Grilk, however, had already stood up and now was peering at the Chechacko's raiment which hung drying on the wire over the stove.

"Well, Bill?" asked he, of Coonrod.

"Go to it!"

The Missourian reached up a huge, hairy paw and unhooked the things. On his arm Henderson laid a restraining hand, but the giant shrugged it off.

"Shoo!" warned he. "Eight months in this yere hell, prospectin' all the way from the headwaters o' the Selawik to Koyukuk, an' now us 'thout hardly enough fer to

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grub-stake on till Spring—it ain't sharpenin' to no morals!"

"But, man," still protested the Doctor, "you—you surely can't mean to overhaul a sick guest's clothing! Why, it's outrageous! It's indecent!"

"So's eight months north o' sixty-six, an' nary shine o' dust but what you could put in y'r eye an' never wink. Eight months freeze an' bone-break up yere on the Hogatiakakat! Sech ain't noways over an' above conducive to no hair-splittin'. Drap it, Doc! 'Cause yere's whar we wises up!"

MAKING no further speech, he began a systematic search. Coonrod's eyes blinked with excitement, the while he gnawed his ragged rat of a mustache. The Doctor, feigning at first not to look, could resist no more than a few minutes. Then he succumbed.

"Huh! Bird's-eye, one can, empty," enumerated the Ozark man, laying the tobacco-box on the table. "Cig papers, two books. Match-box, silver, marked 'C.J.K.' One 32 Smith an' Wesson, two chambers fired. No spare ca'tridges. Watch, gold. Run down at 7.12—what day, er night, I'd like fer t' know? Chuck, nix an' likewise minus. No eats, boys. None whatsomever. Heluva layout fer a man to mush on, up yere along the aidge o' the Circle, now ain't it? But ——! What's *this?*"

From the inner left breast pocket of the *parka* he dragged a deerskin sack, lashed at the throat with thongs of moosehide.

His eyes opened till the whites showed all round. Coonrod, breathless, leaned forward, his knuckly fingers twitching. Even Henderson forgot all his points of honor, as, paling a trifle, he stared at this portent of wealth, this corroboration of the stranger's interrupted cry.

"G'wan, yuh rough-neck!" nagged the Virginian. "Rip 'er up, kain't yuh? Wuss 'n a gal with a letter! Open it, yuh malamoot!"

Recalled to himself, Grilk twitched the loop. It slid undone. The bag gaped. On to the dish-littered table, under the raw lamp-shine, he dumped the contents.

A gasp escaped them all.

Not that actual wealth lay there. No, for only five junks of ore rolled among the dirty dishes and the scraps of food. But in even those few specimens their trained eyes caught the "shine" of pay-dirt—dirt so incredibly rich that none of them had ever yet beheld its like.

Up the Doctor snatched a lump. Wild-eyed, he stared. He turned it this way, then that. You could hear Grilk's breath catch. The little Southerner's hand began to shake with gold-fever ague. Then Henderson laughed, unpleasantly.

At the sleeping figure swathed in furs he glanced. "Well, boys," said he, "it's a good thing for us that I'm—I used to be—an M.D. That's all!"

II

THE wound which Henderson dressed next morning proved only superficial. Though the Chechacko stared about him when the warm water and clean cloths were applied, he made no speech; nor did he seem to notice anything. In his eyes, sunken and reminiscent of anguish, glimmered no wonder. And, directly the Doctor's task was at an end, the man relapsed into his apparent coma.

Thus two days passed; and all this time, though they fed him at intervals, he said no word.

On the third day, Henderson judged him well enough to sit beside the stove.

"Maybe that'll bring him out of it, to shuck those furs and have some indoor clothes on," said he. So they bathed him and dressed him in a strange miscellany—one man's underwear, another's mackinaw and trousers, the jack-boots of a third. Each spared what he could. And presently the Chechacko, still very pale where he was not sore from frostbite, leaned back in the only chair, while the others lolled on the deacon-seat along the front of the bunks and sought in vain to make talk with him.

Then a strange thing made itself manifest. Though the stranger ate heartily enough, as they fed him of their best, he seemed to have lost all inclination, all power to express his thoughts—if indeed, thoughts he now had. Something (as Kipling says) seemed to have wiped his lips of speech, as a mother wipes the milky lips of her child.

Silent he sat there, "serene, indifferent to fate," which, since he had dined that day, no longer could alarm him. From beneath overcast lashes he looked dully at his inquisitors as they in turn tried to discover his name, his habitat and story. Quite childlike and expressionless his face

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had grown; placid, immobile. Betimes he smiled a very little, then fell to fingering the coarse woolen stuff of his mackinaw and muttering in a strangely sibilant jargon.

Astonishment on the part of the three prospectors gave way to anger, then to a sick, gnawing fear. The bonanza strike, the treasure-lode—all questions of humanity put quite aside—what now of *that?*

"What th' ——!" cried the Virginian. "Heah a man butts in on us with——"

"*Shhh!*" interrupted Grilk. "Ain't yuh got no ornery hoss-sense? An' him a-settin' plumb yender?"

"Plumb ——! So's the stove! I reckon they's even, so fur as understandin' goes. If this ain't the original ringtail Jonah stunt, what *is?* Say, Doc, what's up? What *is* this heah brace-game, that luck's a-handin' us? What's the matter of this locoed in-dividual, anyhow? Has he got 'em, er what? You're a reel college-gradooated croaker, an' then some. Push out th' wise talk, you!"

But Henderson only shook a doubtful head.

"Sounds like Russian he's trying to get off there to himself," answered he. "I'm not sure, but it seems that way. It's evident enough, though, he doesn't know what *we're* saying—or care a hoot in Hades!"

"But — but, my great jumpin' jew's-harps!" roared the Missourian. "That kain't be! 'Tain't reasonable; 'tain't accordin' to nature! When he comes, he spouts good enough U. S. An' he's in better shape now than what he was *then.* An' yet he don't know his own handle? Kain't sling no civilized lingo? But only set thar an' wolf down the chow? His belly ain't went on no strike, nohow, I tell you them! Well, say—elucidate! It's your line. Make good, Doc, make good!"

Coonrod, beady-eyed, leaned forward with a breathless interest.

Henderson thought a while. Then he got up, walked over to the stranger and laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

"See here, pard!" cried he sharply.

No response, save a half-scared look and a word or two in gibberish.

"Who—*are*—you?" demanded the Doctor, very slowly, pronouncing each word by itself with the utmost distinctness. "Where are you from? What's your name? Name! *Name!*"

It availed not. The Chechacko only mouthed some unintelligible thing, and smiled and shook his bandaged head.

"*Comment vous appelez-vous?*" queried Henderson, louder still. But the French failed to serve. He tried his halting German. No result. Even a tag-end of Latin, vaguely recalled from Princeton days, fell flat. Then he swore roundly in good English, wiped his heated face and sat down.

A QUARTER-HOUR struggle with the Chechacko, both by means of the spoken and the written word, convinced all three there was no hope. Gloom, blackly impenetrable, shrouded down upon them. The Doctor rolled and smoked one cigarette after another, sure sign of extreme disturbance. Grilk, making oration, paced the floor. The little Virginian, groaning, sat with his face buried in both hands, a prey to sick despair.

All at once the stranger laughed.

Outraged, they glared at him. His eye brightening, he pointed at a pipe upon the shelf. His lips moved.

"*Mishka ni samkaya doroboi!*" said he.

They filled the cob and lighted it for him, gave it to him and for a while left him in peace. He smoked rationally enough, with evident enjoyment.

"Smoke up!" cried Grilk, in icy rage. "Smoke an' be hanged, you pie-faced son of a Swede! Maybe it'll bring ye out of it. Say," he added, turning to Henderson, "why not show him that there ore? Like as not that fixes him plumb immejit."

Doc shook his head again.

"No," answered he. "I wouldn't. Not yet. It might only make him worse. Wait. Time enough. We've got all Winter!"

"But what d'you reckon as it *is?*" insisted the huge man of the Ozarks, rolling a strand of his flaming beard 'twixt thumb and finger. "What kind of a gag you call it, anyhow?"

Henderson reflected.

"Well," said he, "that's hard telling. I've never seen one just like this, not exactly, and I've served in a bug-house, too. It *seems* like some kind of aphasia. There're several varieties, you know. There's the ataxic, the amnesic and the sensory; there's alexia, anarthria——"

"Scat! Drop it! Put that into language, Doc. What's it *do?*"

"Why, in a general way, it affects some cerebral fissure, cortical ganglion or——"

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"Back up!"

"Well, then, it's a bad place in the brain, that keeps a man from remembering, or talking, or reading, or whatever it may be, singly or in bunches. Do you get me? No end of variations, and no end of results."

"How d'you git it?"

"Lots of ways. Disease, or overwork, or worry, or a whack on the head; anything that affects the brain or presses on it, or wounds it, may——"

"It's a kind of nuttiness, then?"

"Yes, and no. A man may have one kind, or more, and still be O. K. every other way. Sometimes it's just the memory that drops out. Again, there's an inability to read or to speak one particular language while another may remain; or there may be a forgetting of just some special classes of words. So you see——"

"All right, let 'er go at that, Doc!" concluded the Missourian, beginning to pace again. "Now this yere duck, he fodders all right. Hits the pipe plumb natural. Seems to be tryin' fer to git some sort o' remarks out o' his gol-danged system. Only he kain't remember who he is, or where he's been, or how to sling his jaw. Is that it?"

"I guess that's about it," assented the Doctor. "This man, now, well—he's just in the position you'd be, for instance, if you should happen to wake up rather sick and tired in a hut somewhere in Siberia, and had no idea where you were or how you got there, and didn't care much. Suppose the last thing you remembered seemed to be quite a while back, and—he's lost, that's all," concluded Henderson, as though weary with explanation.

Coonrod whistled. "Well," he spoke up, "an' is he a-snappin' out of it sometime? Does he plumb fergit, e-tarnal, or does it all come back t' him, arter a while?"

"That depends. Sometimes the other lobe of the brain can learn the forgotten things over again. Sometimes the lesion, the wound, heals up. Then memory may creep back. Again, some special stimulus flashes everything back in a second. It wakes the other personality, you understand."

"Show him them lumps of ore, then!" demanded the Virginian. "That'll fotch 'im out, ef anythin' will!"

"I wouldn't—not quite yet," objected Henderson.

"Coonrod's right!" exclaimed the red-beard. "That's two t' one, agin. You lose!" And he jerked open the drawer where lay the specimens.

On his broad palm he held out the lumps before the stranger. But their guest, with no slightest sign of recognition, regarded the ore with no more interest than had it been just common rock. Up he glanced at Grilk.

"*Prozhki nadzo brovonka,*" he remarked very slowly, as he resumed his smoking.

Grilk tossed the specimens back into the drawer, with indigo language. Then in deep dejection he sat down. The pipe-smoke thickened.

"Kain't he be l'arned nothin', nohow?" finally rumbled the huge fellow. "By gad, he's *gotta!* 'Cause they's millions at stake, now, boys. Millions! *Kain't* he?"

"Perhaps, if you're patient," the Doctor answered. "Yes, by going slow with him, it's possible. But he mustn't be excited, or crossed in any way. Must be fed right and amused and kept quiet. Then by working along from one thing to another, teaching him English again as if he were a child, stimulating his memory and all that, it maybe can be done. But——"

"But what, Doc?"

"But it's a slow process. Infernally slow. Takes endless patience, and all that. Slow as two growths o' hemlock!"

"Weeks?"

"Months! And even then, I warn you, there's no such thing as ever being certain of results."

Coonrod ground his quid-stained stubs of teeth. The storm, buffeting the log walls, cried out with the torment of that savage cold.

"Ef th' whole tarnation deck ain't stacked agin us this time!" groaned the red-beard. "Ef she ain't plumb stacked——!"

III

INTERMINABLY long drew out the Winter. Long, endlessly tedious, grew the lessons given by those eager, baffled men, who burned perpetually with the fires of the gold-lust and the search for their Chechacko's reason.

Day by day, week after week, and so month sliding into month, while the great white parching cold drove amain over the frozen tundra, they labored. Snow, ice and storm sealed the waste places; the sun slunk

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round the dim horizon, a flattened copper ball hanging upon the world's dead flank. In all that hideous desolation, only the smoke-wreath of the *barrabora* stove-pipe proclaimed the presence of mankind. Yet during the all but eternal misery of it, those three determined men kept at their lessons.

Turn and turn about they taught him, masking their object lest the Chechacko's mind be in any way disturbed. As they might have done with some lonely foreign child, they instructed him in English, pointing out objects for him and naming them, making up simple phrases which he slowly mastered, answering his voluble talk, in his own strange tongue, with their slowly patient Anglo-Saxon.

When he seemed to have learned the rudiments, they set him rough spelling copies, and so presently had him reading the headlines in last Fall's *Yukon Messenger*. Before Spring began to be checked off on the calendar their pupil was talking fairly well. His pronunciation was quite perfect from the start, although his forms of expression remained crude. Doc explained this by stating that the man's reflexes had already acquired English sounds and that only his directing mental faculties had gone wrong.

The stranger's progress furnished them a certain occupation and amusement, after all; and that was worth something. The Winter developed them in many ways. One or another of them would be at the Chechacko nearly every hour, till he showed signs of irritation. Then Henderson made them quit, lest they retard the process. For many weeks the ore was not shown him again; nor did they bother him with questions of identity, which for the present they knew would prove quite fruitless.

"Time enough!" judged the Doctor. "Time enough for everything in this infernal Land o' Dead Broke!"

So they taught and fed and amused and made much of him. Uncommonly keen his appetite became, even with the limited exercise that any of them could take outside. He had the best bunk, nearest the stove, while Grilk built himself another. He grew a beard that much disguised him, and took on many pounds of fat. Friendly he became, in a strange sort of patronizing way; he learned to joke, crudely; they almost came to like him. This, despite long silent spells when he would sit and doze and seem to think, smoking the while, allowing no familiarities. Their choicest fine-cut was for him, while they smoked plug. To him were allotted the canned peaches and the sardines. Toward Spring, when the "spuds" ran short, all were saved for the Chechacko.

"He needs raw potater-juice more 'n what we do," grumbled Coonrod, packing them away. "A little scurvy won't hurt *us* none, if it strikes. But as fer him, 'twon't do. They's millions in that busted brain o' his'n—millions!"

The triumvirate diverted him as much as possible. With him they played pitch and forty-five and cut-throat—and they let him win, too, all their petty savings. These he carefully pocketed. For him they devised checkers and chess. They drew maps of the region and left them lying where he could not miss seeing them, hoping perhaps some vagrant clue might dot itself upon the paper, some index to the thing they burned to know might by a chance stand revealed.

On the twelfth of March, after a careful discussion held outside in the lee of the shack at minus thirty-six degrees, they showed him the ore again. He, strangely enough, stared at it wildly this time, then burst out laughing and grew violently incoherent in mixed English and jargon. For about a week after that he seemed to suffer a relapse; he mumbled and chuckled to himself, and stared, and scratched his head. They decided to let him alone for a long while concerning pay-dirt.

Spring drew into early Summer, with sullenly melting snows and clammy fogs that wreathed and coiled, that blinded the wet world with their slow drift and maddened the three men. Laggingly the sun-ball spiraled through the formless void of vapors that clung and shredded into long tentacles among the bleak and barren heights over to eastward of the Hogatiakakat. The moose-birds began to appear. A sound of trickling waters made itself manifest; and the ice, breaking in the river-bottom, boomed and crunched all night long. The jams rotted and gave way. Among the grinding cakes the swollen floods began to froth in white-fanged rebellion.

The men felt that the hour must be close at hand when the Chechacko would give up his secret; when they could lead him forth to retrace his back-tracks and so find that which they burned to know. For now at sight of the ore he had begun to wrinkle his

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brows in thought, in evident striving after memory. Then he would sit pondering, head in hands. Once Coonrod privily observed him take a pencil and begin marking with a sinuous line one of the crude maps. Then, turning the paper over, he tried to draw a chart of his own.

After he was asleep that night, the partners studied this attempt with eager eyes, with hearts that throbbed to bursting. They thought to recognize the lay of the land—here, Cape Prince of Wales; above it, Kotzebue Sound; there, a dot for Fort Morton, with the mouth of the Selawik close at hand; and, over all, a curved line for the Circle.

But when they cautiously interrogated him, next day, he only stared, then fell to asking questions on his own account—questions as to the course of the river down behind the *barrabora*. Gladly they told him its name, and that it joined the Yukon two hundred miles to southward. For him they spotted out the location of Red Shirt, Wolasatux and Notalohton.

In detail they told him all they knew. These things he wrote down in a character unknown to them. Then, filling his pipe again, he sat and thought, undisturbed. From time to time they saw him smile. To himself he grumbled in a low voice; but what he said, they knew not.

Mid-May. And now the three fevered men went out all day long to cradle the river sands, some miles up-stream toward Lake Shelagin. Once in a while the Chechacko went along, too, but took no part in the labors. With what seemed scorn he stood about, hands in pockets, smoking and watching these futile tasks. The partners, aware of the budding of the secret in him, its thawing even as the ice had thawed and broken, molested him not; but in their eyes flickered strange lights. Wo for the Chechacko if, remembering, he now refused to tell! On their unshaven lips sometimes his words would form again:

"Eureka! Struck it — rich! Saved! Share with you!"

IV

BECAME then at length, a day—an evening—when, after a long hard day cradling the sands and having no great amount of luck, they wearily returned to find no Chechacko. Astounded, they searched eagerly but in vain.

Not only was he quite gone, but the *barrabora* had been almost gutted. Tinned chuck, bacon, matches, tobacco, all the firearms and ammunition—he had made a clean sweep of nearly everything that was worth anything to a man in the wilds.

With a frightful imprecation, Coonrod sprang to the rear window overlooking the river.

Gone were the canoes; completely vanished from their mooring-place in the back-eddy at Knuckle Bend!

A note lay on the table. Henderson leaped for it, ripped it open; his face went gray as he read it.

They snatched it from him, as he reeled, hands clutching out before him, toward the door in vain pursuit.

It read:

Here, to-day,
There, To-morrow.

Dear Eurekas, E. Z. Marks & Co.:

Ta-ta, and thanks! You're the limit, all right. I've got ten hours' start, so it's no use. You'll find the other canoe down at Koyukuk, with grub enough to last you through to the Yukon. Don't worry about getting me. By the time you reach Wolasatux, I'll be aboard the *City of Seattle* and away.

No matter who I am. Anyhow, I got mixed up in a gun-fight over at Morton, last Fall, and had to rack out on short notice, just ahead of lead-poisoning of the .44 variety. No chuck, no nothing. Beat it for Eschscholtz Bay, where I stacked into a Husky. After a little pow-wow, in which I got that tap on the dome, persuaded him to swap duds. Then hiked for the uncut. By bull luck, ran into you, when I was certainly all in.

Had to hand out *some* kind of con, so you'd keep me till Spring. Couldn't risk any place but yours. Had to stay buried. Had to make it worth your while. Couldn't blow the facts, or you'd have handed me over. No hemp tea for mine, thanks. How dodge that and stall you off? Used to be a medic, myself. Remembered aphasia. Cinch. Am I some actor? *You* say!

Boys, you frisked me, and would have used me, if you could have. I only turned the game on you, that's all. The quartz? Nothing to it! That's all the lode I know of, just those five lumps. Take 'em, and welcome. Part of my one-time stock in trade as a promoter. But they went O.K., didn't they? Are you on?

Thanks for everything. No hard feelings, pals. Much obliged for the chow, the bunk, the chance to grow a disguise and put on fat. Delighted with the games and your pocket-money. Every little bit helps. Thanks, too, for the grammar lessons and the maps. Couldn't have made my elegant without those maps, that's sure. Lessons a little wearing, at times, but better than swinging. No end better!

Good-by. We part never to meet again, dear pards. You can't say I lied, anyhow. All I told you was Eureka, and that I'd struck it rich and

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would share with you. Well, didn't I strike it rich when I struck *you?* And as for sharing, didn't I? Certainly did! Shared your best, all right, all right. Lead-pipe!

Good-by again, and no end of thanks,

Ever yours,
C. J. K.

P. S.—That fake Russian of mine was some goods, wasn't it? As a bunk-artist, you must admit I'm there! But it near killed me to stand you off, boys, all that weary time. So long! I forgive you. Fare ye well!

AMONG the purple-black rocks and over the pale shingle, the river —the very stream which that instant was bearing the Chechacko far away, toward Notalohton—chuckled derisively.

Through the gaping door of the *barrabora*, empty now, the sun cast, as it sank, a long, blood-red blotch across the floor; and Spring, the mocking Spring of Disillusion, was coming up the Northland.

POLITICS AND FIRE

By CARL M. CHAPIN

THERE was a sound of muffled objurgation from the mass of smoke that shrouded the sidewalk and dimmed the towering front of the ten-story block, and John Langley, Chief of the Twelfth District, came lunging through the yellow curtain like a charging bull, head down, fists clenched, face contorted. In the clearer air of the street he stopped and hurled a wrathful glance back into the dimness. Then he lumbered across the pavement and sank down heavily on the running-board of Truck Eight, throwing his white helmet to the ground and smearing the sweat from his face as he blinked the stinging smoke out of his eyes.

"'S matter, John?" inquired the previous occupant of the running-board, without excitement, not raising his eyes from the imaginary figures he was tracing on the asphalt with an ax-helve.

"Matter? Matter! Here's that bean-head in there wringing his hands because he can't find any place to put his water and when I try to tell him, he fires me out. 'Get t' hell out-a here!' he says. 'I'll send f'r yuh when I want yuh!" What d'yuh

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think of that? that scrawny ward-heeler talkin' t' me like that! He ain't no more fit t' run this Department than my office cat is!"

"If he don't get some water on this fire pretty quick he'll be needin' you—and a lot more," remarked Captain Rogers, taking his eyes from his artistry and casting a critical glance at the burning building. "If she ever gets out-a that cellar we're goin' t' have some flick hereabouts."

"I could-a told him where to find her half an hour ago, if he'd let me. He could-a put her out with a chemical then. An' now look at him—ten engines here an' not a drop of water flowing! I don't care; I'm gettin' through anyhow August first."

"Goin' t' quit?" snapped the Captain.

"Fired," said the Chief sourly. "Retired on account of age. 'Superannuated,' the Commissioner calls it, says he hates to do it but I'm gettin' pretty old. Suppose I ain't husky enough to stand th' pace since they turned the Department into a consumptive ward f'r politicians' relatives."

"Well, what d'yuh make of it?"

"Somebody wants my job, that's all. They *got to* the Big Chief an' now they're after me. When somebody with a wire gets it into his nut he'd like t' boss this Truck of yours, they'll get you, too."

"It won't be long, either," said the Captain soberly. "I got a hotbed of 'em in th' company now, and the king-pin of 'em all's in line f'r a lieutenant's job—Tim Mulvey; know him? Old Dan Mulvey's brat. He can't lift one end of a scaling ladder alone and he ain't got th' guts of a Chinese laundryman, but his old man could break the Mayor without taking his feet off th' dinin'-room table an' I guess Tim 'll be hangin' his turnouts in my office before very long. He's the little Aleck got th' Big Chief's scalp f'r your bean-head friend, Scanlon, and I guess likely 'twas him got yours, too. Do y' know him? There he is, with th' rest of his bunch."

The Captain jerked his head toward a trio of stoop-shouldered, flat-chested laddermen, slouched against the wall of a building behind him, one of them covertly sucking at a cigarette concealed in his closed hand.

"That's Mulvey, there, playin' with th' Regulations," he added.

"I know him," said the Chief. "That's a fine bunch of lungers. I'd like to get just one chance! I'd show 'em who's superannuated! I'd give some of 'em a dose 'ud make 'em go back to sellin' neckties an' leave th' Fire Department alone!"

The two men might easily have passed for brothers, at a glance. Both had the same tanned, leather-like skin, creased, yet tight and firm, in the neck; the same scowling eyebrows, prominent noses, close-set ears and square, dogged jaws beneath the gray "regulation" mustaches of the olden days, cropped close along the lip, but curling a little at the ends. Bull-necked, broad of shoulder, thick almost to deformity through the chest, a bit rotund, perhaps, beneath the belt, but not sufficiently to impair strength or agility; with broad, thick, stubby hands; legs a little bowed and feet that took their stations well apart and heading due north and south—they were splendid types of the old school of firemen, which is fast giving way to a rangier race of smooth-faced youngsters.

AS THEY sat there, silent again after their unwonted indulgence in conversation, a figure, sleek and dapper and unstained by fire, disengaged itself from the edge of the smoke-pall and crossed the street. It was the Aide of the new-fledged Chief of the Department.

"Langley," he said importantly, "Chief Scanlon orders you to take three or four men and ventilate the building. Start from the top and work down. Rogers, you're to start on the second floor and work up. Open her up wide, he says."

"Ventilate!" roared Langley, springing to his feet. "She'll ventilate herself all right in a minute or two! You tell Scanlon that ain't no place t' put men till he knows what she's goin' t' do!"

"Chief's orders," snapped the spruce lieutenant.

Langley pushed him aside and started across the street, with the Captain behind him. They met Chief Scanlon emerging from the smoke.

"Y' ain't goin' t' put men up in there till y' know what this —— thing's goin' t' do, are yuh?" demanded Langley, without preliminary. "She's eatin' over toward them elevators, I tell yuh, an' she'll beat us t' th' roof now. What yuh want t' ventilate f'r, anyhow? They ain't no smoke inside.

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What she needs is less air 'n' more water."

"You do what I tell yuh!" snarled Scanlon.

"I ain't goin' t' take any men t' that roof till y' get your streams started," said Langley stubbornly.

"Then yuh'll go on th' carpet t'morrow, see?" raged Scanlon. "I'll break yuh before I sleep!"

"Don't make no difference t' me," said Langley, "I'm gettin' through all right anyway, ain't I?"

"It'll make some difference with your pension, I guess!" retorted the Big Chief.

His subordinate gulped. To a man of sixty with a wife of his own age and no bank-account it did, truly, make a considerable difference.

"All right," he said sullenly, and turned on his heel.

He made his way straight to Mulvey and his companions, dislodged the trio from the wall and led them across the street, Captain Rogers following with another squad. As the Chief ducked into the doorway he swung the ax he carried viciously through a plate-glass show-window.

"Ventilate?" he growled. "I'll ventilate him!"

To reach the stairs they were forced to penetrate to the center of the building where elevators and stairs shared a common well from street floor to roof. As they started to ascend, the Chief stooped and laid his palm against the floor, jerking it away quickly.

"Humph," he grunted. "Thought so. She'll be chasin' us through the skylight presently."

He hesitated an instant, then led on again with set face. At the first landing Rogers and his men trailed off down the hallway. Mulvey, with his two companions, started to follow. But the Chief had a keen eye on the picked trio. He grasped Mulvey, not gently, by the shoulder and propelled him toward the stairs. Then he seized one of the others.

"What's your name?" he bellowed.

"Rolfe."

He thrust him after Mulvey and grabbed the third.

"Who are you?"

"Sachs," gasped the man, and coughed at the sting of smoke in his throat.

"Humph," said the Chief, "I know your father."

He started Sachs after his companions and followed, pushing the lagging men at every step. At each landing they looked back hopefully, but the Chief, after a critical glance down the well, urged them on. Not until they had climbed eight flights more and were coughing and gasping close under the big, ground-glass skylight did he permit them to stop.

A layman on that tenth floor just then would have pronounced the Chief's assertion that there was no smoke in the building highly hyperbolical. But though there was enough of it to torment the lungs of his companions, Langley was not affected even to the point of husbanding his breath. He grumbled dismally to himself as he trotted up and down the halls, ever keeping a wary eye down the shaft.

"Ventilate?" he growled, sniffing ostentatiously in the faces of his unhappy satellites. "Can't even smell it up here. But ventilate it is. It'll make Scanlon —— popular with the insurance people, anyhow. Get after them doors."

Setting the example, he attacked the nearest office-door with his ax, smashing out the glass and battering the woodwork to splinters until the lock gave way. He disappeared inside, whence the cheerful sound of crumbling glass told of his friendly efforts to add to Scanlon's popularity. When he had thoroughly cleared the window-sashes of the suite he emerged to find the three men still laboring at their first door. The exertion had added to the torture of their tender lungs, and all three were racked by paroxysms of coughing that forced them to rest frequently. The door was apparently as firm as ever.

Langley chuckled under his breath.

"Here, gimme a whack," he said.

They stood back, shamefaced but grateful, and he swung his ax with brawny arms and a skilled eye. *Thump, thump, crash!*—and the door sprang free from its shattered lock.

"I'm gettin' too old f'r this kind of work, Mulvey," he said silkily. "What this Department needs is younger men; good, husky youngsters like you three, now. Ain't that right, Mulvey? Politicians, f'r choice."

An ugly twist came into Mulvey's face and he started to retort, but the Chief's eyes snapped.

"Get in there and clean out them windows!" he said sharply.

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TEN minutes later, after the Chief had wrecked two more suites and taken an anxious survey down the well, he found his three firemen hanging over the ledges of the windows he had sent them to smash, seeking a mouthful of fresh air in the smoke that climbed the front wall in thickening clouds. He dragged them in, one after the other, by the collars of their slickers.

"Thicker out there 'n it is inside, a —— sight," he said. "Guess that's why Scanlon wanted the windows open—to clear th' street. Awful bad f'r them engines, standin' round in th' smoke."

Then he looked at the three faces, blanched under the streaks of grime and twisted with suffering, and his voice changed:

"What's th' matter with yuh, yuh yellow pups?" he shouted.

"We gotta get out-a here!" gasped Mulvey. "We can't stand this!"

"You'll get out-a here when Scanlon orders yuh out. He's th' boss."

"But it ain't safe here!" whined Mulvey.

"Safe?" howled the Chief. "Safe? Good ——! What d' yuh think this Department is for? Of course it ain't safe! An' let me tell yuh it ain't no safer f'r havin' a slob like your friend Scanlon runnin' things. You never stopped to think a-that when you was chasin' the Big Chief out, an' me an' a lot more that's been fightin' fire all our lives because we like it, and not because it looks like easy money t' lay round an' play pinochle in th' engine-house!

"Y' never stopped t' think it might mean a bunch of good men on a ten-story roof an' a mutton-head in charge below that don't know a first-class Metropolitan from a hand-tub. It makes a difference when one of them fellows on th' roof is *you*, huh? That's what your politics is doin'. If you hadn't run old Bill Hammond out-a th' Chief's berth you wouldn't be here now, you can bet on that. Your man Scanlon's put yuh here and, for all he knows about his business, y' can stay here till y' frizzle!"

While the Chief was bellowing forth the bitterness of his heart an engine which had been idly blowing off steam almost under them began to turn over its pumps with a comfortable *chug*-chug-chug, *chug*-chug-chug, *chug*-chug-chug, that quickly grew to a thundering roar. The exhaust, driven upward, set the smoke mass before them to rolling and billowing like the clouds below a mountain peak. Other engines took up the strain until the walls seemed to rock to the tumult.

"Hello," cried the Chief, "guess they've struck something."

He darted back to the hall with the three terrified firemen clinging to his skirts. The well was a huge chimney, belching masses of oily, yellow smoke that seethed against the concave of the skylight and mushroomed back about them in stifling coils. The stairs were blotted from sight—no man could have lived to descend one flight, let alone nine. Even where they were there was no living long.

"Roof!" gasped the Chief chokingly, and started on a crouching run down the hallway. Mulvey quickly passed him and, reaching the iron ladder, scrambled to the top where he hung, beating the scuttle-lid with ineffectual fists and uttering unintelligible sounds. The Chief sprang after him and threw him back to the floor. Then he braced hands and head against the massive scuttle with a force that sent it flying off into space. In another moment all four were on the roof, gratefully sucking in great drafts of the clearer air.

When the Chief's lungs were clear he made a circuit of the roof, scanning the walls through the thickening smoke. After he had surveyed the four sides in silence he turned to the trio, trailing after him, mute, palsied, utterly dependent.

"No fire-escapes," he said, very calmly. "I thought so. That's your father's job, ain't it, Sachs? Building Inspector, ain't he?"

Sachs nodded dumbly.

"Used to make sausages, didn't he, Sachs? What we need in the Buildin' Department, Mulvey, is good sausage-makers—if they've got enough votes in their fist. It's all right, ain't it, to skip a fire-escape or two f'r a good fellow that votes right and comes across with a little package once a year; no harm in it, Mulvey? What's the odds if a couple of stenographers or a couple hundred shop-girls get scorched up—or three or four firemen like me and Sachs and Rolfe—and you, Mulvey, —— yuh, *you*! You're goin' to get scorched good, this time!"

Then, suddenly, Mulvey crumpled, catching at the Chief and hanging to his coat as

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he sank on his knees. Clinging there, he sobbed and blubbered:

"F'r Gawd's sake, Chief, take me down! Ge' me out-a this! I can't die here, Chief! You gotta ge' me out-a this! I'll do anythin', Chief; I'll get yuh anythin' yuh want. I'll get yuh th' Big Chief's job—y' can have Scanlon's job! I can do it, Chief, honest I can! Ge' me down, Chief——"

Even Rolfe and Sachs, weak with fright though they were, turned their backs on the spectacle. As for the Chief, his face wrinkled in a saturnine grin. He broke Mulvey's grip with a sharp kick, and the blubbering fireman slipped to the pebbles of the roof and lay there shaking.

"Take your pick," said the Chief grimly. "Want t' go down head first 'r feet first? Yuh got your choice."

With a comprehensive sweep of his arm he indicated the sky-line on all sides of them. The building rose like a tower, six stories above its neighbors.

"I've seen 'em come down both ways," he went on, stirring Mulvey with his foot. "Head first kind-a messes yuh all over th' street, but feet first is liable t' drive your legs up into your vitals. It might hurt more."

MULVEY lay without motion. Rolfe and Sachs, sick with the horror of that which the Chief's words conjured to their minds, staggered weakly to the parapet and hid their faces. The Chief returned to the street side and, leaning far over strove to pierce the veil that hid everything below. He took off his white helmet and hurled it out, listening intently for any sound that would show it had been noticed. There was no alteration in the tenor of the hubbub that came to him, muffled by the distance. He slipped out of his rubber coat and rolling it up sent it after the hat, straining his ears again. After a fruitless interval he jerked off a boot and swung it viciously downward.

"I wisht I could wake some of them dopes up," he snarled.

Holding the other boot in his hand, he edged along the parapet, seeking a slant of clear air through which he might select a target below. He found none and at the corner raised the boot for a random shot. As he swung it over his shoulder it caught and was roughly jerked from his hand. He whirled round and saw, close to him, a cable of wires, thick as a man's wrist, still vibrating from the blow. One end of it disappeared into the belching flue of the big skylight; the other stretched out through the reek to the roof of another building, diagonally across the street, a hundred feet or more away.

The Chief's cry brought even the demoralized Mulvey. They found him chuckling deliriously as he pointed out along the cable.

"Here she is!" he shouted hoarsely, with a hysterical catch in his voice. "Here's a regular boulevard; all we gotta do is shin across. Get your heavy duds off. You go first, Mulvey. Hang on with your hands and feet and slide to the end of the sag. Then you gotta climb. Better go head-first; it'll make th' climbin' easier on th' other end."

Mulvey, stripped to his pants and shirt, already had his hands on the cable, but at the words "head-first" they dropped nerveless and he began to gibber. The Chief cursed him back to some degree of courage and ultimately got him up on the parapet in position to start his perilous journey.

The heavy smoke veiled the real terrors of that hundred-foot trip across the yawning canyon of the street, and Mulvey, clinging with hands and locked ankles, slid away into the smother. Hardly had he started, however, when a freakish slant of wind, veering in from the water-front, beat down the mound of smoke and they saw him, still sliding, reach the lowest point of the dip and stop. They saw him twist his head and look down where the wind had opened rifts in the smoke, and there came back to them a scream of naked terror, faint but appalling. For a moment he seemed about to lose his hold, thrashing about there in mid-air until the cable sang on the parapet before them. Then he ceased and hung motionless and silent.

"Climb!" yelled the Chief.

There was no movement, no reply.

"Go on!" Langley screamed again. "Climb! Climb! Climb! —— yuh, *climb!*"

This time the answer came back to them, faint above the roar of the engines, pitiful, hopeless,

"I can't!"

"Y' got to!"

"I can't!"

"Come back, then!"

"I ca-an't!"

The Chief looked despairingly around,

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at Sachs and Rolfe standing wide-eyed beside him, and over his shoulder at the red volcano that had replaced the skylight. Then he looked out across the street again and stiffened.

Over the parapet of the block opposite, close by where the cable disappeared, hung a painter's swing and a coil of rope. The eye which saw that rope was no quicker than the brain which grasped its possibilities.

"Hang on where y' are, then!" he called to Mulvey. "Don't look down again. I'm comin' out after yuh."

"You wait here," he said to the two men.

In another instant he was on his way down the cable, feet first, not gripping it with his hands, as Mulvey had done, but hugging it with crook of elbows and knees. When his feet touched Mulvey he released them and hung by his hands.

"Leggo y'r feet!" he ordered huskily. "I gotta get past yuh. Quick!"

Like a child Mulvey obeyed. Hand over hand the Chief worked himself close and swung past, with a mighty heave, the impact of his body drawing a shrill, sobbing cry from the fireman. Still hand over hand he drew himself on, up the slope, until a dozen feet intervened between them. Then he turned about, facing Mulvey's back, and swung his legs up again, around the cable.

"Turn around; shift y'r hands. Quick!"

Something compelling, half menace, half comfort, in that choking voice brought to Mulvey a strength undreamed of. Fumbling and uncertain, he obeyed.

"When I lower this end you slide, slow, till yuh strike th' street. See? An' hang on like —— was after yuh!"

A MOMENT'S pause to recover the breath he had expended in that last admonition, and the Chief began to climb, pulling himself along, hand over hand, up the incline that grew steeper with every foot. Sweat greased his hands; then blood mingled with it and trickled down over his wrists, as the weather-roughened cable ground the skin from his palms. The sharp spike-head of the ax in his belt lacerated his side. A thousand knives slashed at his palms and jabbed his wrists and elbows and shoulders, while a numb ache pounded at his back and twisted remorselessly at the nerves of his neck. He drew his breath in quick, rattling, agonized gasps that pierced his chest. His eyes, inflamed by the smoke, tortured by the streaming sweat, were blanketed by a red fog, full of piercing lights. His head roared and snapped and whirled.

The last few feet of his climb were almost perpendicular. He went up them with the nervous, jumping haste of a sprinter finishing his race, knowing full well that the least slackening meant the end of all effort—and death. He shinned them as a boy shins a slender tree, expecting every moment to feel that slump of the leaping cable, that scream of despair, that would tell him Mulvey's strength had yielded.

Then his hands bumped against the brickwork and with a twist that well nigh tore arm from shoulder and wrenched a cry of pain from his overtaxed lungs, he gripped the cable inside the parapet and hauled himself up, falling inert, like a sack, across the low wall of brick.

For a moment the restful dulness that followed the first sharp agony of his relaxed muscles held him there. Then instinct, born of a lifetime of self-forgetfulness in the face of danger to others, asserted itself. He lunged forward on to the roof, quickly pulled himself to his feet and looked back.

His breath came easier when he saw Mulvey still hanging. Below in the street he saw upturned faces and knew that their plight had been discovered. But there was no time to await the aid that must be on its way. Mulvey, with the strength that only a coward can muster in the naked face of death, had already endured, seemingly, beyond the limit of human endurance.

The Chief knotted an end of the rope in a slip-noose about the cable, well out from the wall, and drew it tight with all his strength.

"If she only holds!" he gasped.

He took a triple turn of the rope about a flagstaff near by and made it fast. Then, tottering back to the cross-arm on the roof, he hacked off the cable with his ax. His knot held; and it was the work of a minute to bend the cable into a rude knot about the noose in the rope. He was too weak to cry a warning to Mulvey. He could only brace his trembling legs against the parapet and pay out the rope, checked by its purchase on the flagstaff. Dimly he saw Mulvey, still motionless, incline slowly toward the perpendicular. He tried to call; but his voice was a whisper. Then, suddenly, Mulvey seemed to awake; to realize. Hand

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over hand he started down, now slipping, now checking himself, until he disappeared from Langley's range of vision below the line of the parapet.

Smoothly the Chief lowered away, every jerk on the line, as Mulvey descended, shooting a tingling agony over the nerves from his torn hands to his brain. He saw Rolfe and Sachs climb over the parapet opposite and start down, slipping and clawing, through the smoke. They too disappeared, but he followed their descent by the throbbing bulletins that tingled to his burning palms with every movement of their bodies. Then, sharply, the stabbing pains ceased, the rope hung limp in his hands and he knew that it was ended.

It was Captain Rogers' shaggy head, projecting through the scuttle, that brought the Chief to himself as he whirled around in the preliminaries of collapse. It revived him like a dash of water. With haughty weakness he brushed aside the kindly arms of the rescuing squad. Very unsteadily he led the return procession down those ten flights of stairs and with the stiff-legged dignity of a drunkard he stalked across the hose-encumbered street to the ambulances, where two surgeons worked over the unconscious Mulvey while Sachs and Rolfe, prone on the curb, gibbered their tale of the miracle that had befallen them. The surgeons turned solicitously to the Chief, but he waved them back.

"Gimme some whisky, Doc," he said. "An' put a couple of rags 'round these, will yuh? An' get a wiggle on."

Their protests profanely overruled, the surgeons fed him the stimulant and hastily bound up the mutilated hands whereupon he marched away stiff-legged and erratic. In a dozen paces he met the Commissioner charging down upon him with outstretched hand. But the Chief's bandaged paws remained motionless at his sides. He thrust a blackened, blood-smirched visage into the Commissioner's astonished face and croaked:

"Superannuated, hey?"

Then, veering toward a neighboring hose-wagon, he borrowed coat, boots and helmet, climbed painfully into them with the driver's assistance, and turned his attention to the locating of a newly-arrived water-tower.

THE RUG OF IMAM

By

ADELE M. DONOVAN

MALCOLM had dropped in, as he did periodically, to look about the dim, high-ceiled, faintly-perfumed salesroom of Sufi, the rug dealer—Sufi who with such magical tact was always at a patron's elbow when wanted, never when he was not.

The world knew Malcolm as author, musician, clubman; Sufi knew him as a connoisseur not to be hoodwinked, and, what was more to the point, as a man who bought that which pleased him. It was of this very knowledge that the temptation was born—persistent, insidious, overpowering—to show him the rug of Imam, his brother!

Times were hard, yes, bitter hard. Men came to him every day, not to buy, but to induce him to buy again the rugs he had sold them; and Malcolm, he knew, had but to see it. Yet before his eyes was the vision of Imam—Imam with the strange new dignity that had come to him with his sorrow—turning at the low door of the hut to say to

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him "You will not sell it, Sufi; it is my soul!"

"Hello! Hello! What have we here!" Malcolm exclaimed softly, pushing among a heap of rugs to extricate one that had caught his eye.

And Sufi, watching, felt his heart leap guiltily. He had found it! Fate had done it, not he. Malcolm called to him.

"Sufi, put this on the screen for me, will you? How is it you have never shown me this before? A Saruk, isn't it? Ye gods! What a beauty!" he said, under his breath.

Sufi hastened to his assistance.

"Ah, that," he said, in a slightly strained voice, "yes, it is a Saruk, though it was not made in the Saruk country; but—" he hesitated "but, I regret—it is not for sale."

Malcolm seemed not to have heard him. He stood silently before the screen upon which Sufi had thrown the rug in question. With the light falling from above along its silky pile, it glowed like a jewel against the dusky half-lights of the background. There was something poignant in its beauty that caught at Malcolm's throat, and something strange; what was it? Ah! That odd wavering in the pattern near one end; and the sudden deepening of the border color from clear wine-red to a glorious ruby! He must have it; that was plain.

"How much do you want for it?" he asked, turning suddenly to Sufi.

"I regret it is not for sale," the other replied.

Malcolm, amused but unshaken, asked quietly, "Why not?"

"Oh," said Sufi, shrugging his shoulders and throwing out his hands, "it is perhaps sentiment, that makes me that I do not want to sell it. It is—well, like a picture of the soul of that man who made it—and I knew him."

Malcolm glanced at him keenly, ironically. But Sufi's eyes, the inscrutable eyes of the Orient, were upon the rug, and his low voice hurried on:

"He was young—oh, very young—but no weaver in the village could make such rugs as he made. I come from that place. In the mountain it is, far away from Saruk. But his mother was from the South-land; she taught him; yes, she taught him. But his rugs were different, he was different. He would go for days alone into the mountains, and coming back would work long with dreams in his eyes, saying nothing.

"When one asked him where he learned such patterns, such colors, he would laugh softly and say, 'How do I know! The winds whisper them to me, and the streams as they go their way, and the birds sing of them. Go listen, and you too will learn.' Yes, he was different, Imam. It was when he loved Zalikha, that he made this rug. She was beautiful—Zalikha, the daughter of Nadir—and he loved her as he loved the mountains. And Zalikha was to be his wife. But, one day, came a caravan to the village, buying rugs for the market at Constantinople; and Imam was in the mountains. And with the caravan was a man who saw Zalikha and wanted her. He told her of the world outside, of Constantinople and Paris, and when Imam came home with that look in his eyes that he brought always from the mountains, she was gone and he was left alone.

"You see it?" Sufi asked suddenly, pointing to the break in the pattern. "It was there he lost her. Is it not a cry of pain, that ending? He wove it with blind eyes, and hands that shook, and no man dared to speak to him. When the rug was finished he broke the loom that held it, not fiercely, not in anger, but swiftly, quietly and, saying no word to those who stared after him, he went away to his mountains. No one has seen him since."

The low voice stopped.

Malcolm shook himself together. What an actor the man was! He had almost believed him.

Half an hour later Sufi stood alone, gazing stupidly at the slip of paper which Malcolm had left in his hand, a slip of paper with a powerful black scrawl across its face. Five times its market value! Yes, clearly it was fate.

Lifting his head, he called to a young attendant and, pointing over his shoulder, said sharply,

"The rug on the screen—roll it with care and send it to this address at once. Do it quickly, do you hear?"

He heard the soft swish of it as it fell to the floor. How slow he was, that Barbur! Now at last he had it rolled, was carrying it out through a rear door, was gone. Sufi caught his breath.

"Imam, my brother, forgive me" he murmured.

Then, looking at Malcolm's check, he shrugged his shoulders.

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ITS beauty was like a haunting strain of music, the meaning of which seems always on the point of revealing itself, yet never does.

Malcolm drew it forward that the light from a shaded lamp might touch its colors into life, then throwing himself into an easy chair, he lighted a cigar and smoked and looked. He had done little else all day.

The evening wore away. At length, having sat long with the dead cigar between his fingers, he rose impatiently. It was womanish—absurd; the thing was getting on his nerves. An hour with Will Dalton would knock it out of him. Going to the telephone, he gave a number.

"Connect me with Mr. Dalton's office, please."

It was fully a minute before Dalton's sharply-fired "Hello" smote his ear, expanding instantly into a genial, "Oh, hello Mal, is it you? Say, just wait a moment till I settle this confounded buzzer, will you?"

Malcolm, holding the receiver to his ear, smiled involuntarily. The wire was bringing into the restful quiet of his bachelor den all the hum and confusion of a newspaper office in the busy hours of the night.

"Stop in on my way home? Why yes, I'll be glad to," Dalton said in answer to his inquiry. "Genevieve has that Bentley crowd out at the house to-night, and I hadn't intended to get home till they were well out of the way."

"THIS is nice!" he exclaimed, an hour later as he dropped into a chair and selected a cigar from the case Malcolm pushed toward him. "Well, what's up—anything new?"

"Not a thing but that rug yonder," Malcolm answered.

Dalton glanced at it indifferently.

"Hm! That is a dandy!" he said, after a moment's inspection. "Glad Genevieve can't see it. She would lie awake nights wanting one like it." Then, lifting his head, a flash of amusement breaking over his face, he said, "By the way, was this the 'important engagement' that kept you from Genevieve's party to-night?"

"By George!" Malcolm said, in dismay, "I had forgotten all about that fib!"

"Well, you're safe this time," Dalton chuckled, "for I couldn't tell on you without giving myself away."

The two culprits, laughing, settled down to the enjoyment of their ill-gotten peace. The talk ranged far and wide—politics, sports, finance, college memories and what not. Malcolm was right; viewed as an antidote for sentimentality, Will Dalton was unequaled.

But gradually the conversation flagged, and Dalton, whose eyes had been wandering to the place where the light lay softly upon the rug of Imam, paused in the midst of a sentence.

"What's the matter with that rug, Mal?" he asked.

"The matter? What do you mean?" Malcolm asked quietly, but with a glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

"There is something about it," Dalton went on, "something—I can't tell what—almost human."

"So you feel it too, do you!" Malcolm said, with a quick flush of pleasure. "I thought it was a fool notion of mine. I asked you up here to-night, in fact, to help me get rid of it. I bought the thing of Sufi; you know him, don't you?"

"Rather!" Dalton answered "To the tune of a couple of thousand, in good hard cash."

"Well," Malcolm went on, "he told me a yarn about its having been woven by a strange, poetic young weaver up in a village of the Caucasus. He was to have married a beautiful girl, and wove his feelings for her into his work. But she ran away with a traveling rug-merchant; and the boy, after finishing his rug and breaking his loom, disappeared into the mountains and was never seen again. Sufi spins these tales by the yard, the women like them, and of course there is no truth in this one but," he broke off with a short laugh, "it is rather queer, isn't it?"

"Hm!" Dalton said thoughtfully, looking at the rug. "It certainly is all-fired queer!"

SUFI sat late, poring over accounts in the large back room that served him alike as storeroom and office. All about him, beyond the small circle of light cast by the single desk-lamp, were rugs, rugs, rugs, hanging against the walls, spread upon the floor, heaped confusedly in the corners.

But Sufi had lived half his life with rugs crowded thus about him; to him they held

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no mystery, only value or lack of value. Yet several times, of late, alone with them at night he had felt oddly oppressed, as by the vague sense of a living presence.

To-night it was unendurable; and he rose with sudden impatience, pushing back his chair. As he did so he gave a startled exclamation.

There was a single window in the room, barred but unshaded, which opened to an alley, and Sufi, in facing it, could have sworn that he had seen a woman's figure glide away from it.

So this was the explanation of his strange uneasiness; he was being watched! Could it be that Marianna— He stood still and an angry flush mounted to his forehead. One could wish his worst enemy no greater curse than a jealous wife. If he could but catch her at it!

Pretending to have seen nothing, he turned on more light and busied himself among the rugs as though searching; then, as having found that which he sought, he picked one up and carried it into the sales-room beyond. Here, dropping at once his burden and his unconcern, he ran on tiptoe down a narrow passage and, gaining the door which led into the alley, stealthily and noiselessly drew back the bolt. By opening a crack he could command the lighted space outside the window; but beyond it could see nothing, for the night was dark. He watched and listened, his breath growing short, the hot blood beating at his temples.

Aha! She was coming back! He had scarcely hoped for it. But certainly his eyes, grown keener in the darkness, had discerned a shadow deeper than the night, creeping along the wall beyond the window. It paused on the edge of the light, hesitated, then dared to peer in. It was indeed a woman, but though the veil she wore about her head concealed her face, one glance at the slight figure told Sufi it was not his wife. But if not Marianna—who then? One of a gang of thieves, perhaps, getting the lay of the land.

Having satisfied herself that the room into which she looked was deserted, the woman had pressed closer to the window and was staring eagerly within, when Sufi, crouching like a cat, threw open the door and sprang upon her. After one smothered scream she struggled silently, but so fiercely that, strong and agile though he was, Sufi would have lost her in the darkness had she not slipped and fallen.

Then for the first time she spoke, and as Sufi, pinioning her arms, half-dragged, half-carried her toward the light, she pleaded in broken English to be released.

"I will you no wrong! Ah! I will you no wrong!" she panted desperately, again and again.

Even in his excitement Sufi was struck by a familiar note in her voice, and as the light fell across her white face he dropped his hands, crying out in the dialect of his homeland, "Zalikha, child of Nadir! *Thou!*"

At sound of her name—of her native tongue—she covered her face with her hands and broke into piteous sobbing. Sufi, taking her gently by the arm, led her, unresisting now, through the dark passage into the office, talking the while as one talks to a frightened child—brightly, soothingly. A hundred questions he asked her to which she paid no heed, striving to regain her self-control.

When the long sobbing breaths had ceased to shake her, she lifted her tear-stained face and said quite simply, "It is the rug, Sufi—Imam's rug, that I would see. He made it for my eyes—mine only; and I thought if I could but see it, it would ease, perhaps, the pain."

And she pressed one clenched hand to her heart.

"But you betrayed him," Sufi said, with dry lips.

"Do you think I need be told it?" she flashed at him, an odd mixture of pride and self-scorn in her voice.

And Sufi, to gain time, asked darkly, "But where is——"

Zalikha stopped him with a stamp of her foot.

"Hush!" she cried. "I will not hear his name—the viper! He lured me, an unknowing child, from the sweet life that was mine—from the great love that was mine! I have escaped him, yes, but now all the days of my life I must bear this hunger in my soul, this cry that will not be still. Ah, Sufi, show it to me!" she pleaded, holding out her hands. "*My* rug! You have it. They said he gave it to you when he went away."

"And who are 'they'?" asked Sufi.

"The men in Paris who had been in our mountains. There is no one who has passed that way who has not heard of its beauty."

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"Zalikha, listen," Sufi said. "I can not show it to you now. It is not here. It may be that I can not for some time get it here, but——" he broke off in distress; then, shrugging his shoulders, "I will see what I can do."

And, to get away from the subject, he plied her again with questions—how she came to be in New York—how she lived, and where.

"When I escaped him in Paris," she answered, "I said to myself, 'I will find Sufi and my rug; I will stay close to them, and watch and wait. Perhaps the cry of my heart may one day reach to Imam, my love. He will know, he will forgive, he will come.' Our people have helped me and hidden me. They stretch like thread around the world, a thread that Imam may follow, as I did. But when I found you, Sufi, I dared not come to you openly; how could I know you would be kind! I thought if I came as I did to-night, and have done other nights, I might see the rug—Imam's rug and mine!" She clasped her hands convulsively and rose to go. "I will not come again," she said, "until you tell me," but her eyes pleaded that it might be soon.

She gave him, as address, the name of a theater in a poor and crowded district of the city. He looked at her questioningly.

"I dance for my bread," she said simply. "I shut my eyes to the ugly place in which I find myself; I see the grass-plot near the river with the Summer moon above it, and hear the voices of the singers round about me. Ah! Sufi, you remember?"

And throwing out her arms, she swept across the floor with a rhythmic motion full of passionate dignity and grace. Then, suddenly dropping her hands, she laughed bitterly.

"I pour out in my dancing all the pain and longing that is in me," she said "and when I am done, they shout and beat the floor. I wake, and my soul sickens—Ah!" with a gesture of disgust.

"But Zalikha!" Sufi cried eagerly, "with such dancing as that you could bring the world to your feet, and be rich—rich!"

"No, no!" she shook her head. "I dare not step into the light. He would find me. And I fear him, Sufi—more than death I fear him!"

She stood for a moment silent, then, lifting her head, said brightly, "Ah, but now I go."

And, refusing Sufi's insistent offer to accompany her, she slipped away as she had come, a shadow among shadows.

II

IN THE weeks that followed, Marianna, wife of Sufi, might have found in his actions much food for jealous fears—long absences from the shop; mysterious errands in obscure neighborhoods; much night-work to be done at the office which yet was not done.

But so skilled was Sufi in ways of secrecy that Zalikha herself knew nothing of the protecting web that was being spun about her. She felt only, with relief, that her burdens were growing lighter, not dreaming that Sufi, with his sore conscience, was at the bottom of the relief.

But Sufi's talents in the line of secret web-spinning were soon to be put to another test. It was about this time that, returning to his shop one day after the noon hour, he found Barbur, his young assistant, in a state of visible perturbation. The simple inquiry as to whether any one had called during his absence seemed to create such hesitation and distress that Sufi repeated it sharply.

"Yes," Barbur said, with some reluctance, "yes." A man, who had asked him many questions about a Saruk rug said to belong to Sufi. He had described exactly the rug sold some months before to Mr. Malcolm.

"Fool! You told him!" cried Sufi excitedly. "Who was he? What was he like?"

Barbur, much injured as to his feelings, had told him nothing; could not say who he was, never having seen him before. But, pressed with eager questions, he described the man as having the appearance of a gentleman—speaking English with ease yet looking, to his mind, like a Greek or an Italian; he might even have been one of their own people. His size? Not large. Barbur thought him smaller than Sufi, but heavier, of stronger build.

Sufi's eyes narrowed and he grew quieter. Had he worn jewelry of any kind? Barbur had noticed nothing but a ring—an odd green stone in a fantastic setting—and had noticed that chiefly because the man had seemed annoyed when he saw him looking at it, and had furtively slipped it about. Barbur further announced, with dignity, that the stranger had presented him with

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five dollars, with the request that he say nothing of the interview to his master, which seemed to him, Barbur, a good and sufficient reason for telling him at once.

Good! That would do. Barbur was an invaluable assistant; his salary should be raised next month. The man was, probably, some dealer commissioned by a patron to secure the rug.

But Sufi sat long, absorbed in thought. His brother's enemy! On the trail of the rug, and of Zalikha! He should get neither, if human ingenuity, in the shape of a rug dealer, could prevent it. And that the web now spun bore some resemblance, in purpose and effectiveness, to the model proved by the spider, may be gleaned from subsequent events—events which brought Sufi and his shop for a brief hour into the public eye.

On a certain night some three weeks later the police were notified by telephone that burglars were at work in the shop of Sufi, dealer in Oriental rugs; and officers hurrying to the spot reached it just as a man was making his escape by a rear door. He resisted arrest in a desperate manner, opened fire, and was himself shot dead in the battle that ensued.

The strange part of the affair was that while the entire stock of valuable rugs had been overhauled and examined, not a single one had been taken; and no attempt had been made to force the money-drawer of the desk which contained a considerable amount of cash.

The dead man appeared to have been of Latin or Oriental blood, but had nothing about his person that might lead to his identification unless it were the ring of curious workmanship, set with a dull green stone, which was found suspended about his neck by a cord.

This much New York knew. More, perhaps, it might have known had Sufi chosen to speak; but he did not. A man who had done much evil was dead; why should New York know who or what he was—how and by whom he had been trapped? And, further, what was it to New York that Sufi should go to look at the dead face of the man who would have robbed him, or that, going, he should have seen standing beside the marble slab that tall gaunt figure he knew so well, with the dark, beautiful face and the brooding eyes?

Yes, it was Imam. In the midst of the crowd that pushed and jostled in its eagerness to see the thing that lay there, his motionless figure was as marked an object as a single stately pine set in a desert waste. Sufi watched him till he turned away, and, following him to a spot where there were no curious eyes to note their meeting, called his name.

"Sufi!" Imam cried, stretching out his hands to him with an exile's hunger, his face alight, "Sufi!" And then, the shadow of an habitual sorrow creeping back into his eyes, he added simply, "I come to seek her."

III

THAT evening the homeward-setting tide of traffic roared past the salesroom of Sufi, the rug dealer, all unheedful of the fact that within, in the perfumed dusk, Zalikha stood and waited. Leaning against a pile of folded rugs, her face hidden in her bended arm, she waited until his voice, in a wave of joy and pain and fear, broke over her.

"Zalikha!" he cried.

"Imam!" she whispered.

And with a swift motion she faced him, holding to the rugs behind her to stay her trembling figure.

Under the gaze that searched her soul her eyes faltered, then grew firm; for he should see it all—all; the wrong, the bitterness, the sorrow, the yearning, starving tenderness.

How long they stood thus, wordless, neither knew; but suddenly, with an exulting cry, Imam sprang forward and caught her in his arms. When she had sobbed out her wretched story, he stooped and kissed her fiercely.

"You are avenged, Zalikha, my beloved," he said brokenly, "though other hands than mine were chosen for the deed! I have tracked him long and closely. He sought you through Sufi and my rug. He seemed to know, as I knew, that it would draw you as a magnet draws a needle. I knew nothing of the world, of cities, of the ways of men, and he knew much; I let him live that he might serve me with his cunning. 'When he finds her,' I thought, 'I, too, shall be there, and what will happen then, will happen!' But it was not written so; and my hands are innocent of his blood, though not my heart!"

"But now we may forget him, may we

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not, Imam?" Zalikha said softly. Then lifting her head with a sudden passion, she caught his hands.

"And Imam," she cried, "you will take me away, will you not? Away from the sight and the sound of cities, back to our own mountains. I could not understand it then, your love for them, but I do now. Ah, I do now!"

The light in Imam's eyes glowed deeper.

"The mountains!" he said, and drew a long, trembling breath. "The mountains! Yes, we will go to them! And the rug, that sings of our love, Zalikha, it shall be finished. Ah! The rage and despair I wove into it when you left me—they shall stay to make the end more perfect!"

Poor Sufi! The framework of lies he had prepared to meet the fatal question was a masterpiece, but it was never used. No man could look into the still depths of Imam's eyes and lie. Instead, he tore his hair, confessing.

"I went to the man, Imam," he said dejectedly, "even before you came, I went to him. He will not give it up, though I have offered him any rug I have—rugs worth many times the price he paid for yours. He does not believe me when I tell him of you,—because he does not wish to believe me. For he loves it well, the rug."

Imam, who had listened silently, with drawn lips, to the recital, stood for a moment motionless when it was finished; then lifting his head with quiet resolution, he said:

"But I must have it! *I* will go to him!"

IT WAS late afternoon; the time when Malcolm worked best, and liked least to be interrupted. He, therefore, looked up from his desk with some impatience when Drake, his man-servant, troubled and apologetic, announced a visitor who would not be denied.

"A queer customer, sir," the man said, dropping his voice. "I could do nothing with him; he *would* see you, sir. Some sort of a foreigner, I should say."

"I thought I had told you——" Malcolm began, then paused.

Through the half-open door he had caught a glimpse of the waiting figure in the hall without, and, with a curious change of voice, "Well, show him in," he said.

And Imam was shown in. Afterward, Malcolm, in relating the incident to his friend, said,

"I simply can't describe the sensation that came over me as he stood there looking at me. It was as if that rug, with its baffling beauty had suddenly become incarnate before my eyes—its mystery solved, its riddle answered; and I knew him before he spoke."

When Imam did speak it was to say quietly, "I am Imam, and I seek my rug."

It was neither an appeal nor a demand, but the simple statement of a fact; and the words had scarcely left his lips when his eyes fell upon the rug itself, lying in an adjoining room. In an instant he was on his knees beside it, half-laughing, half-sobbing, running his fingers along its silky pile; talking to it softly, as if it were alive.

Malcolm, silent and intent, watched him; and as he watched, his artist soul slipped free of its hard-bound shell—conventionality—flashing to Imam, when he rose to his feet, such sympathy and understanding as no man had ever given him.

Under its stimulus, Imam, his dark face flushed, dark eyes burning, poured out all the joy that was in him and the pain that had gone before.

And as the twilight gathered he painted for Malcolm the vivid picture of his life—his kinship with the woods and mountain, his love, his sorrow; the patient, dogged tracking of his enemy through alien cities and dark ways in the search for his rug, for his bride. And when the tale was finished, the two men stood in silence looking at the bit of woven color that seemed its very echo.

"Take your rug, Imam, my friend," Malcolm said, at last, withdrawing his eyes as by an effort; "I could never keep it now."

He held out a hand and Imam grasped it, thanking him with eloquent eyes.

"But take it quickly," Malcolm went on, a note of sharpness in his voice, "for I believe," he laughed a short, dry laugh, "I believe I love the thing!"

He turned away and, walking to the window, stared into the deepening dusk while Imam gathered up his precious burden.

There was a pause.

"I go, monsieur," Imam said softly.

But Malcolm seemed not to have heard him.

Once again Imam spoke, his low voice vibrant with feeling, this time to utter, in some strange, soft tongue, a wish or blessing, perhaps a prophecy; then, with the parting daylight, stole away.

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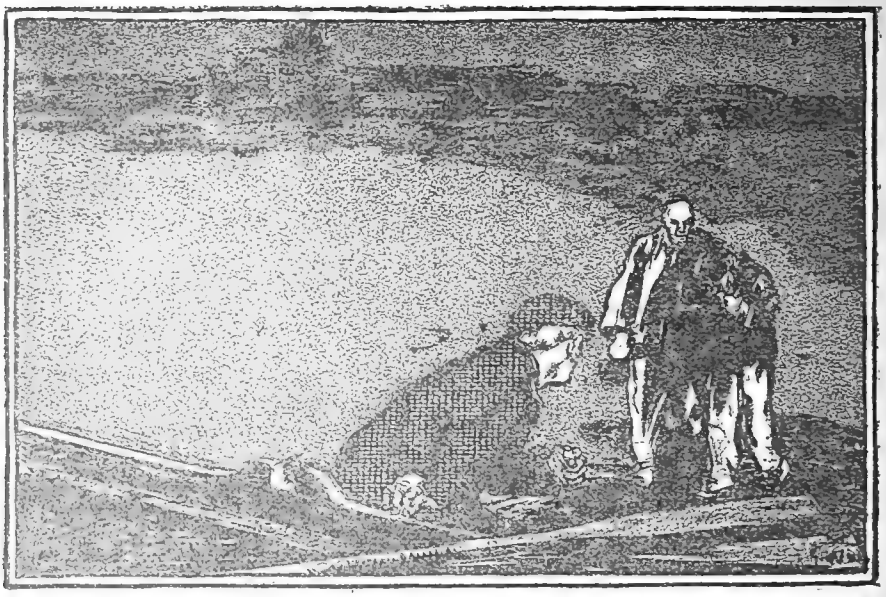

AN OFF-SHORE CAPTURE

By ADOLPH BENNAUER

I WAS pounding the beach at La Paz, both toes out and not a copper in my pockets, when Captain Cecil Drake ran across me. I'd heard of Drake, and I knew he commanded the *Hermosillo*. He was a slim, dark man of forty, with eye-glasses and a cane. You'd never have taken him for a seaman. But he was, and a good one.

He took my measure in a single, all-embracing glance and his lip curled disdainfully. "Looking for a ship, I suppose?"

I nodded. "I've been aft, sir," I said quietly, "but I'm not particular."

"No," said he scathingly, "I shouldn't think you would be. Let me take a look at them hands."

Before I had time to object, he had caught my wrists and turned my palms upward. The next moment he dropped them with a snort of disgust.

"Dish-washing is about your lay!" he scoffed, as he turned to go. "Those hands haven't touched a rope for months. No 'has-beens' for mine."

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and began to roll up my shirt-sleeves. "I can convince you," I said quietly, "that I am not a 'has-been.'"

"Eh?" Rather startled, he turned and surveyed me. Then he grinned. "You're on," he cried, throwing down his cane. "There's a vacant second-mate's berth aboard the *Hermosillo*. Prove that and she's yours."

I hadn't been mistaken in my man, for Captain Drake was a scrapper, and the next minute we were rolling in the sand, mauling each other to our hearts' content. When I arose, a few seconds later, it was at his earnest solicitation.

"Fine!" he declared, wringing my hand in genuine enthusiasm. "We don't wear uniforms nor brass buttons aboard the *Hermosillo*. *Men* is what we want—*fighters*, and I guess you'll fill the bill. Come on uptown and have a drink."

A few minutes later, when we sat in the open-roof café of La Paz, cigars and liquor before us, he grew more serious.

"You say you've been aft," he declared. "How did you come to lose her?"

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I met his eye rather sheepishly. "Rum has ruined many a better man," I suggested.

"I see," he said. He toyed for a moment with his empty glass. "We don't call that a sin aboard the *Hermosillo*," he continued, "so long as a man confines his carousings to the shore. But at sea we demand strict temperance. This pearl-trading business is a risky thing in itself, what with these —— Chinks waiting to hold up a man in the gulf and bamboozle him on the land, and we've all got to be on our guard. We'll go aboard from here and see you fitted out."

"Very good, sir," said I.

We had just filled our glasses for the last time when a man's shadow fell upon the sanded floor. The Skipper and I glanced up simultaneously.

The newcomer was a naval officer—an ensign, to judge from his rating badge. He came directly toward our table and, without deigning to take any notice of me, accosted my companion.

"Hello, Drake," he called familiarly. "Thought I'd run you down somewhere. Saw your schooner out in the bay. What are you doing here?"

Drake acknowledged the greeting with a careless wave of the hand. "Hullo, Merrill. Oh, just buying up some pearls."

The officer permitted himself to indulge in a wry smile.

"I see; same old business. I thought I'd drop in and tip you off. You're working pretty close, Drake. The *Oklahoma's* on her way here from Magdalena Bay. She ought to be off Todos Santos by now. You'd better look out."

My companion went to the trouble of taking his cigar out of his mouth and turning about in his chair until he faced the youthful officer.

"What in —— have I got to do with the *Oklahoma?*" he demanded. "Is this American soil?"

The ensign flushed slightly and drew back, visibly embarrassed. "Well, no, I suppose not," he stammered. "Still, I thought I'd give you a friendly tip." He retreated awkwardly, now and then glancing back at us in the most curious and bepuzzled fashion.

Drake returned to his wine with a palpable sneer.

"Suppose we go aboard now, Mr. Newbury," he suggested.

I NODDED, and we arose and passed out of the little café and down sleepy Main Street to the harbor. The *Hermosillo* was a witch of a craft, a topsail schooner not over two hundred tons burden, and as trim and smart a looking vessel as you would find upon the sea. The crew were still ashore, but aft on the taffrail sat a gigantic Mongolian, the biggest lump of humanity I had ever seen. I took him to be the steward.

"All right, John," I said shortly. "You come below, fixee cabin, eh?"

For the space of ten seconds he stared at me—not a flicker of the eyelash, not a movement of the mouth. Involuntarily my eyes sought the Skipper. He was surveying me in unconcealed amusement.

"My fault entirely," he laughed. "I forgot to tell you. My mate, Wan Tsang Chang—for short I call him Jimmy. Jimmy, my second officer, Mr. Newbury."

To my confused acknowledgment, the yellow man-mountain gravely inclined its head. In haste I followed the Skipper below.

"Excuse me, sir," I gasped, "but do I understand you to say that I take my orders from *that?* Where, in the name of Tophet, did you pick him up? Does he understand navigation?"

Drake nodded. "He's a wonder. I laid him aboard at 'Frisco when he was at outs with the Brotherhood and ready to commit suicide on account of it. Hardly speaks a word of English, but he's a seaman and a navigator and the best authority on pearls this side of the Orient. Wouldn't lose him for a fortune."

"Good," said I. "If he's worth all that, I'll try to treat him as if he was human. But I'm down and out now, you understand—not a copper to my name—or I'd never be taking orders from a Chink."

At eight bells the crew returned—fifteen of them, all told—and of all the vile, piratical sons of Satan, they were the élite. I couldn't see how we had anything to fear from the Chinks so long as they remained aboard, and for the sake of my own skin I was mighty glad we had Jimmy. Two hours later I was called into the cabin and found the Skipper pacing the floor, his cane behind his back. At the table, a handful of pearls before him, sat the mate.

"Newbury," said the skipper, "you'll be taking us ashore to-night. Jimmy and I,

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intend to pick up some pearls, and I don't trust any of that riffraff forward."

"Good enough," said I. "When do we start?"

"Ten o'clock, sharp," said he. "We'll take the jolly-boat and be back by twelve. I don't want to miss the flood."

Accordingly, at four bells I had the jolly-boat brought up to the gangway and we three got into her. I took the oars, as a matter of course.

"I'll leave you here, Newbury," said the Skipper, as he and Jimmy tumbled out upon the sand. "Don't drop asleep now, and don't stray from the boat. We'll be back by eleven."

"Eleven o'clock it is, sir," said I. "But couldn't you give me two bits and let me run up-town for a minute? I'd like to send a telegram to some friends."

He burst into a laugh and struck me across the shoulders with his cane. It was an uncommonly heavy cane and it made me wince.

"Pretty good," he cried. "The saloon is right next to the telegraph office, isn't it? Well, it'll be a long, dry wait, I know, so here's your quarter. Only, be sure and be back by eleven."

I promised and departed in the direction of the town. By ten-thirty I was back at my post again, but the Skipper and Jimmy had not yet returned. It was all of an hour before I heard them approaching, and then I could see that Drake was leaning heavily upon the Chinaman's arm. At every step he gave vent to a groan, and his left hand was clasped against his breast. I sprang forward, heart aflutter, but Jimmy brushed me disdainfully aside.

"You jump boat, —— quick," said he.

I obeyed without comment and the next moment I was clawing our way off the beach.

"It's all right now, Jimmy, all right now," the Skipper wheezed. "They won't follow us any farther, and a stitch or two'll put me in shape by morning. You've got the pearls safe?"

The mate nodded.

"Chinks," explained the Skipper, addressing me abruptly. "About ten of 'em waylaid us in a side-street."

I grunted and kept on pulling. A few seconds later we bumped against the schooner's side. Jimmy and I got the Skipper aboard and helped him to his stateroom.

"We'll lay here overnight, then, I suppose," said I.

He let out an oath. "We will not!" said he. "You get the ship under way, as I told you. The course is north by west."

I went forward and roused the watch and got the vessel under way. Ten minutes later I was glad I had done so. Hardly had we got her about when the shore began to bristle with lanterns. From time to time we caught the sound of voices, shrill and militant, and once I thought I heard the *chuck* of oars in rowlocks; but the breeze freshened then, and we passed rapidly out of earshot.

I KEPT the deck all night and when morning dawned I found that we were in a sort of strait between an island and the shore, and just off the entrance to a little bay. Knowing the Skipper's condition, I'd have kept the vessel on her course and never disturbed him if we hadn't rounded a headland just then and run slap on to a Chinese junk. Her deck was alive with coolies, and on her poop paced two white men, who were scanning the sea expectantly.

I left the deck and bolted below. Jimmy was just coming out of the Skipper's stateroom. In one short word I acquainted him with the situation.

"Velly good," said he. "You bling ship to anchol." And with that he turned and reëntered the cabin.

For a moment I stared blankly after his retreating form, wondering whether it was he or I that was crazy. However, orders are orders, so I went on deck and had the schooner run in and anchored. To my surprise, the crew took the affair as calmly as had Jimmy, and then I knew that the stranger junk was no enemy, but that she was there on hand as expected.

A minute later the mate came on deck with the Skipper. Except that he was unusually pale and clung inseparably to his cane, Drake was as fit as a fiddle, and I saw that, besides his other accomplishments, Jimmy must be a bit of a rough and ready surgeon.

"All right, Mr. Newbury," said the Skipper; "we'll go aboard the junk now."

"Yes, sir, if you say so," said I. "But you won't mind if I stay below in the boat. I had to pawn my brass knuckles."

He burst out laughing. "I'm afraid that

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wouldn't do, Newbury," he replied. "We're going aboard for good, you know, and you'll have to get used to them some time."

I thought he was fooling. "I don't get you, sir," I confessed.

He raised his cane and pointed in the direction of the junk. The Chinks had lowered a small boat and the two white men were getting into her.

"We're going to swap commands, that's all," he explained.

For a second I stared at him, my breath coming short and quick. Then I nodded, stammered out some confused reply and hurried below to make up my dunnage. When I heard the boat bump alongside I went on deck. A tall, gaunt man and a shorter one were just coming up the side. They exchanged greetings with the Skipper, indulged in a brief, low-toned conversation, and then went below with their bags. We took their places in the boat.

"Well, what do you make of her?" asked Drake, as we put a leg over the rail of the junk.

"Oh, not so worse," I returned cheerfully. "First chance I ever had to bully a lot of Chinks, and this will sort of even me up with Jimmy."

But I was mistaken; it wasn't my say-so at all. The question of command finally worked itself out like this: the Skipper paced the poop with his cane, hatching plans and planning courses. Jimmy turned into a regular demon and hazed the crew from bowsprit to taffrail, and I worked the ship.

Hardly had we got ourselves straightened out when the men aboard the *Hermosillo* began bawling at the windlass. In less than a quarter of an hour she was under way and headed southward. At the Skipper's command we got sail on the junk, and of all the bungling, awkward, exasperating methods of locomotion I ever experienced the progress of that mud-scow took the palm. That she would make more leeway than headway, I had expected, but I was not prepared for the counter movements at the stern and quarter, nor for her knack of turning half-way round at every thrust of the tiller. However, with good sea-room we could make at least some pretense of keeping her on a course, and a short while later we had passed out of the little strait and were rooting our way northward along the shore.

For the rest of that day the Skipper paced the poop and, with a glass at his eye, swept the sea astern. But if he had expected to sight anything he was disappointed, for, save the low, irregular line of the shore, the horizon remained unbroken. Toward evening he called me into his cabin. On the table lay two Chinese masquerade suits, —eyebrows, mustaches, scalps and queues complete.

"We'll have to get into these before evening," said he. "We're due in Loreto at ten."

"Captain!" I gasped. "You're joking!"

He grinned, but it was not a pleasant grin. "I am not," he returned shortly. "You've been pretty good at playing blind so far. Don't let me lose faith in you now."

"Well," said I, "orders are orders. But you know how I hate Chinks."

I took the togs and put them on in my cabin. When I looked at myself in the glass I didn't know the party. So it was with Drake. The only trouble was, we had white men's complexions. But here, again, we profited by the versatile Jimmy. By the time he had finished with his China-lac we could almost talk the lingo. The stain was so perfect, in fact, that I was afraid it would never come off. But Jimmy assured us that it would—with turpentine.

"Now," said the Skipper, "if a native dugout or a United States man-o'-war comes along, you sit tight. You're a merchant from Canton and you're after pearls. You can't speak a word of English, so don't try. Just keep still and look the part."

"Very good, sir," said I. "I'll beat the monologist in a moving-picture film."

AT FOUR bells, sure enough, we dropped anchor in the harbor of Loreto. Ostensibly, the Skipper had come for a little rice and tea, but I noticed that when he went ashore he took along his automatic. As before, I was asked to accompany them, and upon this I made a demand for my other clothes. Who would expect a rich mandarin to play oarsman? I wanted to know. The Skipper came back at me with another question. Whom else on board could he trust; and wouldn't it look even more incongruous to have a white man in the party? I gave in at this, upon his promise to let me run uptown and send another telegram.

Our expedition that night was made without mishap and at twelve o'clock we re-

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turned aboard and got the ship under way. Jimmy and the Skipper were in high spirits and as soon as we had passed out of the harbor they went below and locked themselves in the cabin. As before, I kept the deck till morning.

At daylight the vessel's course was changed for Guaymas, where the Skipper intended to lie up for a fortnight, pending the arrival of the *Hermosillo*. Jimmy took my watch then, and I went below to get some sleep. When I returned to the deck the wind had freshened and we were out of sight of land. I glanced aft and saw that Jimmy and the Skipper were leaning over the rail, their eyes glued to their binoculars. At the same moment I became aware that the crew, clustered in the waist, were gazing in the same direction.

"Newbury," called the Skipper over his shoulder, "take a look at that craft and tell me what you make of her."

I adjusted the glasses and surveyed the black speck long and carefully.

"A launch," I vouchsafed, striving to appear calm. "She seems to be following us. I can't make out her character."

"I can!" the Skipper snapped, rescuing the binoculars. "That's a naval launch, tender to the *Oklahoma*. I've been expecting her."

For a time I continued to gaze anxiously astern. "It's freshening every minute," I suggested. "We might be able to make it."

"Make it, ——!" exploded the Skipper. He folded the glasses and began stumping the deck. "That launch makes eighteen knots and this scow can't do ten. She means business, too. The best thing we can do is to sit tight and let Jimmy play the skipper."

So, indeed, the case proved. The wind, that at first had appeared so promising, soon failed us altogether and we rolled helplessly in the wash of the sea. In no time at all the craft astern was near enough to be viewed plainly with the naked eye. From her single funnel belched a column of ebony smoke, and the sea at her cutwater was divided into hills of rushing foam. Her cockpit was filled with jackies, and in the stern sat an officer in uniform. A little later I picked him out to be Merrill, the ensign we had met in La Paz. At this I swore.

"Junk ahoy!" he called, as the launch slowed up alongside. "Coming aboard you."

Jimmy advanced to the rail, stared impassively down at them for a moment and gravely inclined his head.

A couple of Chinks tossed them a line and a sailor in the bow caught it and made it fast. Then the officer, followed by twenty armed seamen, came tumbling up the side. After stationing his men conveniently in the waist, he whipped out a long, official-looking envelope and strode aft.

"You skipper, eh?" he asked, addressing Jimmy. At the mate's nod he handed him the paper. "My authority for coming aboard and claiming possession," he announced.

Jimmy returned the paper without the flicker of an eyelash. "No read," he stated succinctly. "W'at t' —— you want?"

The ensign let his eyes flash alternately between the Skipper and myself. I tried to appear calm, but knew from the beating of my heart that the effort was a failure. Outwardly, Drake manifested no concern, but the tensity with which he gripped his cane showed plainly enough the state of his feelings.

"I came," said Merrill distinctly, "for Captain Cecil Drake. This envelope contains warrants for his arrest from both Mexico and the United States. The charge is theft of a hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls."

Jimmy shook his head. "No here," he stated emphatically.

Merrill's fists clenched and he took a step forward. "You lie, you wooden-faced heathen!" he snapped. "He's right here on this poop, and if he doesn't come forward of his own accord I'm going to go over there and take him!"

Jimmy's face was a study. It was the first time I had ever seen him cornered. Alternately his almond eyes dulled and sparkled and the muscles in his throat worked convulsively. Otherwise he preserved his impassive calm.

"No here," he reiterated distinctly.

With a mocking laugh, Merrill stepped forward. So quickly did he move that Drake had no opportunity to avoid him, and the next instant he had whipped queue and skull-cap from the Skipper's head. Never shall I forget the consternation that ensued. The Skipper stood as one transfixed, the pallor of his face showing plainly

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through the tan. Jimmy gave one look at him, let out a frightened yell and drew from his blouse a flat, rose-colored box. At that instant Merrill turned and saw him.

"The pearls! The pearls!" he cried, and he wrenched the cane from the Skipper's hand and sprang forward.

THE Chinaman's long, yellow talons had been working with the stubborn lock, but at sight of the advancing officer he turned and fled forward. Into the midst of the sailors he hurled himself, knocking aside like tenpins those who sought to oppose him. The interference delayed him considerably, however, and by the time he reached the bows Merrill was upon him. I saw the heavy cane raised. Twice, thrice it descended, and then Wang Tsang Chang, with all his dignity and his seven feet of bone and muscle, crumpled like a weed to the deck.

The officer stooped quickly and wrested the box from his fingers. After one look at the blood-bespattered cane he shuddered and tossed it over the side. Then, triumphantly, he marched aft, to where I stood, raging, beside the Skipper.

"Here they are, sir," he cried, thrusting the box toward me. "We got your messages O. K. and captured the *Hermosillo* last evening."

I bestowed upon him one withering glance, snatched the box out of his hands and hurled it into the sea.

"*Here!*" he yelled. "What are you doing?"

"Saving your worthless life!" I snapped. "If you'd got that box open, you'd have got your death!"

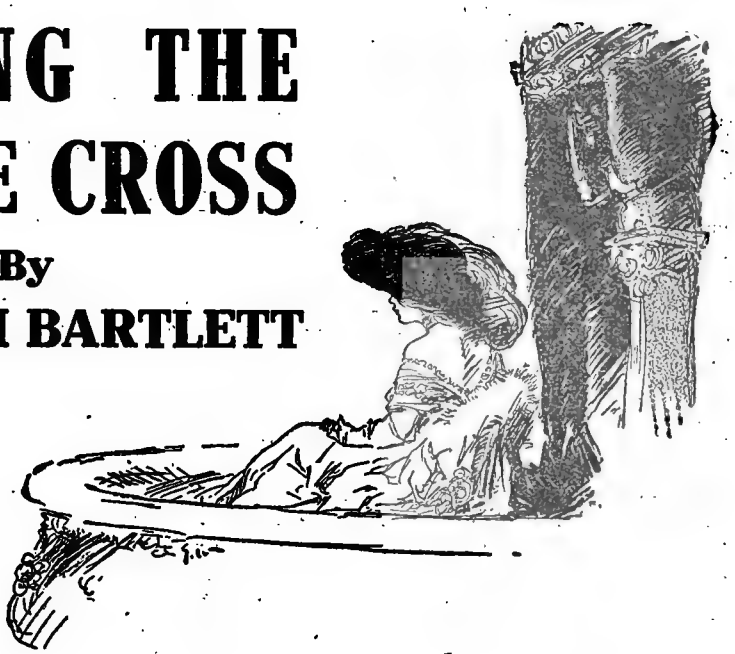
He drew back with a cry, his blue eyes widening.

"But—but the pearls?" he gasped.

"The pearls?" I groaned. "Good God, can't you remember anything? The pearls were in that cane!"

ERASING THE DOUBLE CROSS

By RANDOLPH BARTLETT



"I DON'T think I get you," Henry Morrison, owner of the Irving Theater, said to his business manager, Ashton Campbell. "Are you kidding me?"

"No, Morrison, I am not kidding you," the manager answered. "This stock-company game is getting good, and I have done a whole lot toward building it up. Also a great deal is due to Sylvester, for without his personal drag we wouldn't have got anywhere like the business we have. For this Sylvester and I each want, in addition to our present salaries, twenty-five per cent.

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of the net profits. You deduct a fair interest on your investment and we cut the winnings. Is that plain?"

"Plain? Well, yes! Plain monumental nerve! What do you think I hired you and Sylvester for? To sit around and decorate? Would I be giving you a hundred dollars a week, and Sylvester three hundred, if I didn't think you were both worth the money? You two must think I'm crazy!"

"You don't think I'd spring this without some kind of backing, do you?" Campbell asked.

"Backing? Say, what the K. & E. are you driving at, anyhow, Campbell?"

"Simply this—if our proposition isn't accepted, we quit the Irving and open a stock company of our own at the Lyric. Then we'll see who's the brains of this business!"

"But Sylvester's under a five-year contract, with no cancellation clause. It binds us both."

"You don't seem to remember that that contract expired while you were abroad," Campbell reminded him.

"Well, didn't I cable you to renew it for another five years?"

"You did. But when we came to sign up, Sylvester decided he would be better off banking on my ability than your money, so he placed himself under contract with me for five years. I'll lend him to you only on the terms I have laid down."

Morrison looked at him a minute, as if he could hardly believe his ears. Then he gripped the arms of his chair and leaned forward:

"You snake! You low-down, good-for-nothing Judas Iscariot! Haven't you any sense of decency, honor, gratitude, nothing at all? You seem to forget that I picked you up off the road when you were a cheap, forty-dollar advance agent, and inside of a year you were getting a hundred. Then I give you full charge of the business, and you double-cross me! Why, you hound, do you know I'd have turned over my whole bank-account to you without a question, not because I thought you were so square that it hurt you, because we all have to put over a trick or two in this business now and then, but because you ought to be expected to have some sense of gratitude."

"Aw, cut it, cut it!" Campbell snarled back. "If you had turned your bank-account over to me it would have been perfectly safe, and you know it. I'm no thief. As for gratitude, I guess I earned my salary from the start, and the fact that you've left everything to me shows who's the brains of the business now, whatever has been the past history. My cards are on the table, and it's up to you. Sylvester and I can get the whole cheese if we want to, and you ought to appreciate that fact."

"You're no thief, eh? Then I'd like to know what fancy name you call yourself. You steal my leading man when I'm away around on the other side of the world, and then demand a quarter interest in my business. That ain't stealing! Oh, no! Look here, Campbell—if I was a poor man I might have to stand for your black-jack scheme, but I've got a couple of million dollars where I can get at it, and I'm just willing to spend about half of it, if I have to, breaking you and Sylvester. If what you say is true, and Sylvester is under contract with you, he quits the Irving the end of this week. As for you—you haven't got any claim on me at all, and you quit now—this minute! You're through and I want you to get out of here as quick as you know how, before I throw you out!"

Campbell didn't wait to see whether or not Morrison meant what he said as to the personal objection. He knew that the proposition was rejected finally and he had some work ahead of him. He had not been bluffing, and was ready with his plan of campaign, "whichever way the cat jumped." In this he had a distinct advantage over Morrison, who had to busy himself with shouldering a lot of details which he had been leaving to his manager, and at the same time get a new mental grasp of the situation.

Keeping solid with the newspapers was one of Campbell's specialties, and the next morning they all had big stories and display advertisements telling of Sylvester's resignation from the Irving Stock Company, and the formation of the new one to be called the Sylvester Stock. Matinée maidens at thousands of breakfast tables reveled over portraits of the classic features of the popular actor, and mentally transferred their allegiance from the Irving to the Lyric.

Morrison did not underestimate the strategic advantage of his opponents, and he kept the telegraph wires busy all day trying to secure material for a counterblast. Finally he secured a new leading man, but

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his announcement the following morning was buried under another of Campbell's sensations, timed to the minute.

This was to the effect that Miss Ethelyn Van Pelt, a clever society amateur, had been engaged, "at tremendous expense," as leading woman of the Sylvester Stock. This was "bigger news" than Morrison's and got all the prominence. The owner of the Irving realized that he had lost the first round and that the battle was to be expensive.

THE Sylvester Stock opened its career with a fanfare. Souvenir portraits of the handsome Sylvester were given away to all women present, and they reciprocated by deluging their hero of a hundred plays with flowers. It was a huge success, and the entire first week was a triumphal procession. The following Saturday Morrison found that his house, instead of producing its usual $2,000 a week profit, would run a hundred dollars or so in the hole.

It was not a shock; he was expecting this, or worse, and was too busy thinking to pay much attention. He didn't care so much for the immediate loss of money, but what worried him was that he did not seem to be getting any nearer to a plan for undermining his competitors. He was puzzling over the problem one afternoon when Gus Hoffman, manager of a vaudeville theater, dropped in for a social call.

"You're looking pretty bad, Morry," Hoffman said. "Losing out?"

"It ain't that," Morrison answered. "But I've got something on my mind."

"Well, come on with me out to the Pajarada Hotel for dinner, and we'll cheer you up. There's always a lively crowd out there."

Morrison accepted. He was glad to get away from himself for a while.

The Pajarada was a fashionable family hotel located picturesquely some distance out in the country. Morrison had never been there, but on his way out in Hoffman's car he remembered vaguely that Sylvester lived there, and asked whether this were not the case.

"Sure," Hoffman said. "He's our star boarder and principal freak. I suspect that he gets his board free, just to keep all the society dames buzzing around the place. It's sickening the way they slobber over him. You'll see."

Morrison saw.

Before dinner women crowded around the actor in the drawing-room, maneuvering like football-players for a word here, a glance there. At dinner he sat at the head of a rather larger table than the others, and those women who had been so fortunate as to draw seats at it, paid more attention to him than to their meal. Sylvester played his cards well, Morrison admitted. He never lost his assumption of dignity, his reserve, his aloofness. His classic features from time to time would harbor a classic smile, but never an amiable grin.

It was easy to understand how he kept thoughtless women, with nothing better to do, in his thrall for an indefinite length of time, simply through the air of mystery and semi-gloom in which he enveloped himself. He never ceased acting. In fact he was a much better actor off the stage than on, Morrison thought.

After dinner Morrison was taken up to the roof-garden by his host, who was called away a few minutes later. Morrison found a seat in a vine-sequestered corner and sat there silently looking out over the lights of the distant city. Suddenly he heard the rustle of silk, the sound of soft voices, and realized that Sylvester and a woman companion were approaching. They could not see him for the trellis, and he made no move.

"I fear I must go now," the actor was saying. "My car is waiting to take me to the theater."

"You seem to think of nothing but the theater," the woman said.

"Art is the most jealous mistress in the world."

"And the loveliest?" This very softly.

"No, but the cruelest," and Morrison heard Sylvester utter a sigh that he had used with splendid effect in a dozen romances.

"How do you mean—'cruelest'?" the woman asked.

"Infidelity is punished with swift banishment—everlasting exile."

"I understand." Then a pause. "It must be a lonely life."

"Some of us must be the puppets for the rabble's pleasure."

"How you must scorn that rabble."

"I neither scorn nor love. All my emotions I must hold in leash at Art's command. And now, good night."

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"Good night," the woman whispered, as the actor walked away with firm, even tread.

But the woman stayed and looked out into the night. Morrison sat still, not wishing to embarrass her. Then he let his mind run back over the conversation he had heard, and smiled cynically, as he remembered the unctuously mouthed phrase, "Infidelity is punished with swift banishment—everlasting exile."

As he thought, he ceased smiling. The germ of an idea came to him—the inspiration he had been seeking for a week. With the inspiration came the necessity for action. Would that woman never go? She would and did. Hardly had the elevator door closed behind her when Morrison rushed for the stairs and ran down the six flights. He could not wait for the elevator to return; minutes were golden now. He sought out Hoffman and demanded an immediate return to the city.

"Hustle out your car," he said. "I've got to catch that 9:20 for New York."

"A little sudden, isn't it?" Hoffman asked.

"I should say it is, and I ain't going to explain either!"

MORRISON caught his train, and when his departure was learned, every one began to guess what his mission could be. It seemed that this was the very time he ought to be on the battle-ground. He had a new man installed as manager, his company needed attention, and the Campbell-Sylvester combination was scoring on him at every turn. But no explanation was forthcoming. He was away two weeks, and when he returned he was still silent, but apparently contented. Hardy, the new business manager, was worried. Continual deficits made him feel helpless, and he was afraid he was not making good, but Morrison reassured him.

"Never mind," the owner of the Irving said with a cheerful smile. "We can't get the business right now. I can't, you can't, nobody can. They've got the drop on us, and all we can do is try to work up a little at a time. The deficit hasn't been over $200 a week yet, and at that rate I will last considerable more than a century. So we'll just give the best shows we can, and not do any worrying. Our turn will come."

Hardy was satisfied that Morrison had something up his sleeve, but he could not guess what it was.

About this time the manager of the Pajarada Hotel received a letter from a firm of well-known New York attorneys, informing him that Miss Marguerite Buffington would pass the season at his hotel, and detailing her desires in the way of accommodation for herself and her maid. The letter requested the hotel management to draw on the writers for all expenses, as Miss Buffington desired to be entirely free from business annoyances. Expense was no consideration and Miss Buffington might remain for an indefinite period if her desires as to privacy and accommodation were satisfied.

There was nothing especially unusual about the letter, and the name of the lawyers was a sufficient guarantee that the bills would be paid, so the finest suite of rooms in the hotel was reserved for Miss Buffington. In a few days she arrived, a French maid her sole attendant. When she dined in solitary grandeur, the first evening she was at the hotel, the guests found a topic even more interesting for the moment than Sylvester himself.

There was a distinguished air about her that made every one look at her a second time. She was of medium height, slim but with exquisite curves at her waist. Her hair was deep brown, and her eyes of the same secretive shade. All her movements were deliberate and naturally graceful. Her jewels were few, but distinctive, especially a pearl dog-collar appraised by several at a valuation of about $30,000. She displayed little interest in her surroundings—none whatever in the other guests. She isolated herself as completely as if she were dining in her own apartments. Sylvester took a mental inventory of her, but failed to see anything more than just another haughty society lady who undoubtedly would be a regular patron of his theater in a short time.

A week went by, however, and still Miss Buffington seemed unaware of the presence of any other person in the hotel besides herself. She would go motoring, shopping, or make a lone round of the hotel's golf-links, but her isolation remained perfect. Nobody knew her ancestry, and the hotel manager replied evasively to all questions. It was to his interest to maintain the privacy that his guest so manifestly desired.

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Only once did she betray any interest in the theaters of the city, but upon being told by the information clerk what theatrical offerings were available, she dismissed them all with a shrug.

"There is a very excellent stock company at the Lyric," the clerk assured her. "Mr. Sylvester, who lives here at the hotel, is the leading man."

"Stock companies are never excellent," Miss Buffington replied with a tone of finality, and turned away.

Naturally the clerk repeated this conversation to Sylvester, and naturally it piqued that monarch deeply, though he said nothing. But he made a resolve that he would show this haughty miss ("for professional reasons only," he assured himself) that she could not so lightly dismiss him and his art. But the problem was how to get acquainted with her. The rest would be easy. He started a custom of waiting until she was seated at her table in the dining-room and then strolling past it to his own table, very slowly, so as to give her a full opportunity to admire his classic features and athletic form. Only once did she look in his direction. That time she seemed to be looking at his face, but he felt that she was looking at something the other side of him, and he raved and seethed within him.

ONE day Sylvester's chauffeur was sick, and as the actor was driving from the city to the hotel in his car, something which he did not understand very well, went wrong and the machine stopped dead. He was no mechanician and was tinkering away in a futile manner with the motor, when he saw another car approaching, and cursed his luck when he discovered that it contained Miss Buffington. Here was another humiliation for him, for a man never feels so ridiculously helpless as when fussing with a powerful automobile that he does not understand. He saw the young woman lean forward and say something to her chauffeur, and her car pulled up at the side of the road behind his. Her driver came toward him.

"Can I help you, sir?" the man asked.

"I hope so," Sylvester growled ungraciously. "I can't figure out what's the matter."

The actor stood aside while the expert went over the machine, and it occurred to him that he must look hopelessly foolish. In a few minutes the chauffeur turned to him with a grin.

"You've only run out of gasoline, sir," he reported.

"Can you let me have enough to take me to the nearest garage?"

"I'm afraid not. We've been on a pretty long run to-day, and I guess my own is pretty low, but I'll look."

He went back to the other car and spoke a few words to Miss Buffington as he lowered the gauge into his tank. Then he shook his head, and the girl leaned forward and said something. He came back to Sylvester.

"I'm sorry I can't spare any gasoline," he said, "but the lady says she will give you a lift if you care to go with us, and you can send back for your car later."

This was hardly the sort of way in which Sylvester wanted his acquaintance with Miss Buffington to begin, but it was better than nothing, so he accepted.

"I am very much obliged to you," he said, as he handed her his card. "It was very foolish of me to start without enough gasoline."

"You are entirely welcome," she replied. "The hand of every man is against the automobilist, so we must help one another whenever possible. I am going to the Pajarada Hotel. Is that your direction?"

Sylvester bit his lip.

"Yes," he said. "I live there."

"Do you? What a coincidence! I have been there two weeks now and haven't got acquainted with any one yet. You are fearfully exclusive, aren't you?"

"I thought we were particularly sociable."

"Then I'd hate to see you frigid!" she laughed.

So that was the class she was in. Sylvester had all women tagged and divided into classes, and one was made up of those who want to meet you (meaning Sylvester) but who are too proud to give any sign, and this manifestly was where Miss Buffington belonged.

"I should like to redeem the reputation of the hotel by introducing you to a few of my friends," he said.

"That would be very thoughtful of you," she answered simply.

"I might give a little theater party," he suggested.

"But the theaters here are so poor," she answered innocently.

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"I protest," and Sylvester forced a short, vicious laugh. "I am the leading man of the company at the Lyric, and I won't let you run me down without a trial."

"Oh, dear—how stupid of me! I really ought to apologize, for I have never been in one of the theaters here. I spoke from superficial knowledge."

"Then let your apology take the form of an acceptance of my invitation."

"You have trapped me neatly," the girl answered with a laugh. "I could not refuse now, even if I wanted to."

Taken altogether, Sylvester thought this a fairly auspicious beginning for their acquaintance, in spite of its unpromising beginning in which he appeared in such a poor light. And he proposed to carry the acquaintance as far as he always did—securing her interest without committing himself. Her first week at the hotel had been an open challenge, so it seemed to him, and he went gladly to the fray. It was his only recreation, this game with women, and he welcomed a new player who promised better sport than usual. The true fisherman prefers the rod and reel to the net.

Remembering the almost genial attitude of Miss Buffington during that first ride, it was difficult for Sylvester to understand her actions of the following week. He admitted his classification must have been wrong somewhere, for she did not seem so overpowered with joy in his acquaintance as he had fondly imagined. In fact, as she became introduced around, she began to show preferences for some of the other men who rallied around her.

To Sylvester this was insufferable, inexplicable and unspeakable. Not in all his experience with women had he been treated like this. It was a blow to his pride, and a bad example for the other women of his circle. They were noticing how little attention he received from the visitor. Other women had bowed to him unsought, and here was a mere chit of a girl flouting him after he had given her all the opportunity in the world to adore!

After the one theater party she had not gone to see him act, notwithstanding that he had exercised, in that performance, all the wiles that usually won his feminine audiences. As Sylvester pondered these things he made an almost savage resolve that he would win this girl in spite of herself. He would make her love him—not simply admire from afar as did all the others; he would make her really suffer for her superciliousness.

From that moment Sylvester was lost.

ABOUT two weeks later all the newspapers in the city received telephone messages "tipping off" the engagement of Carleton Sylvester and Miss Marguerite Buffington. The tip came from a photographer, who mentioned incidentally that he had just made some splendid new photographs of the bride to be.

Reporters besieged the Pajarada, but aside from curtly corroborating the rumor, Miss Buffington refused to be interviewed, and declined absolutely to satisfy the general demand for information regarding her family history.

"My affairs are mine," was her reply to all questions. "I don't see what my relations have to do with this at all, so far as the public is concerned."

This made the story still better. The marriage of an actor and an actress is only good for a story on an inside page, the regulation caption being, "Drama behind the scenes." The marriage of an actor to a girl not on the stage is worth a display on the first page of the second section, the headlines kept standing for this usually being "Drama is played across the footlights." But the marriage of an actor to a woman whose financial resources seem limitless, and whose antecedents can not be learned, is a pure mystery story, and is good for the first page of the paper any day of the week, especially if good pictures of the "beautiful heiress" are available. Its "news value" ranks with a presidential message or a really "classy" murder.

So it transpired that the news of the capitulation of Sylvester, the unscarred veteran of a thousand cardiac encounters, was so emblazoned in every newspaper the next day that no one could possibly escape it. Campbell got his first intimation of it from this source, as Sylvester could not quite make up his mind how to break the news. The manager straightway rushed out to the hotel.

"What does this mean?" he demanded of the actor, shaking a newspaper in his fist.

"I suppose it means what it says," Sylvester replied weakly.

"Well—you've done it now!"

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"Done what?"

"Let some doll-faced girl nab you, and spoil everything!"

"Look here, Campbell, you've got to be respectful when you speak of Miss Buffington! If there was any 'nabbing' done, it was done by me!"

"Yes—I guess that's right too. You've feathered your nest pretty well, but how about me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Say, Sylvester, you don't think you're going to be able to hold your grip on that bunch of women now they all know you've been landed by this millionairess beauty—honest now, do you?"

"I don't see what difference this will make with my Art."

"Art—ha! Without the sentimental side you couldn't qualify for an 'Uncle Tom' show, and don't kid yourself!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so! I'm telling you the truth for your own good."

"All right—then if you think I've lost my grip we'll just call off our contract. I'll show you I can get engagements without you. I did pretty well before I ever saw you and I guess I can again."

"No, you don't!" Campbell retorted. "You pick up a bunch of money and want to quit. If this thing fails you're the responsible party, and Miss Whatsername ought to come through."

As a matter of fact, Campbell began to think he might have been a little hasty, and decided it would be well to wait a few days and see how things turned out before doing anything that would make a breach of the partnership inevitable. So he grumbled a little more and went back to the city. Lots of actors were married, he mused, and the public didn't care, but he could not remember an instance when the home affairs of a purely romantic actor were made public property without the actor being forced to abandon sentiment for more substantial forms of art. And he knew that Sylvester was at sea outside of the purely sentimental.

A GREAT change now came over Miss Buffington's attitude toward the theater. Without consulting any one she had bought a stage-box at the Lyric for a month in advance. At every performance she sat there alone, exquisitely gowned and concentrating her attention upon the stage every moment Sylvester was upon it. When he made his exit she would sit back in her chair and assume a bored expression. None of this escaped the watchful eyes of the women, and it was difficult to keep interested in either the play or the man when this obtrusive fiancée was almost as conspicuous as the leading man himself.

When there was no performance or rehearsal the girl would drag Sylvester around with her on shopping trips, to cafés, anywhere there was a crowd. It was evident everywhere that she had taken full possession. The newspapers vied with each other in making snapshots of her, and she never was known to avoid a camera. One sheet made a daily feature of a new photograph of her every day for a week, under the caption, "Who is This Mysterious Heiress?"

Campbell began to find more and more basis for his pessimism as the days went on. Receipts continued falling away. The theater had been robbed of its romance. The only hope now was that as soon as the wedding was over this infatuated young woman might be induced, for business reasons, to keep in the background, and Sylvester might regain some of his lost ground. With this hope the manager began drawing upon the surplus that they had accumulated earlier in their run, to tide over the bad business.

Sylvester was too completely captured to make any suggestion to Miss Buffington of avoiding the publicity which was being showered upon them. His subjugation was shown by a little incident when he hinted, ever so tactfully, that he wondered who she was. She looked up into his eyes with her sad brown ones, and said:

"Is there no one in this whole world will take me for just what I am, and not for what I have or what my father was?"

What she had was so manifest, from her mode of living, that Sylvester was not curious about that, at least not as to details. He knew it was a great plenty. And the manner of her speech was such that she might have been a princess incognito, so he kissed her hand with one of his finest obeisances and was more than ever her slave.

"Of course," she went on, half apologetically, "I will tell you some time. But for now, let us live in the Springtime of our love,

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when everything is born again, when all the world is new, and there have been no yesterdays."

Sylvester urged an immediate wedding, and compromised upon a delay of a month. Campbell protested that he did not believe their money would hold out that long, and began to make suggestions of approaching Miss Buffington for financial aid. Sylvester would not consent to this, except as a last resort, until after the wedding.

Then, two days before the date set for the ceremony, the blow fell.

Through some mysterious channel every newspaper in the city "discovered" simultaneously the identity of Miss Buffington. She was known, they said, to the burlesque stage as Gussie Harris, but her real name was Marguerite Buffington, so she could not be accused of masquerading. She was not notable, excepting as one of the favorites of the front row of the chorus. The reason she had not been recognized was apparent, for not even her most intimate friends could have traced any resemblance between the portraits of the gorgeously gowned Miss Buffington and those of the scantily clad Gussie Harris.

It was all over but the shouting.

In a stormy scene in Miss Buffington's apartments the young woman bested Sylvester at every turn, and showed him that nothing had misled him but his own conceit, if he had been misled. She declined to break the engagement and threatened him with a breach-of-promise suit if he went back on their troth. As for the source of her income, it was none of his business until she became his wife, and in her own time she would prove to him that she had earned every dollar of it in a perfectly honorable way. Her life had been as irreproachable as his own, if not very much more so. They were both on the stage from the same cause—intense admiration of the opposite sex—and she had been as aloof with men as he with women.

Routed, Sylvester went to Campbell and received some more of the same.

"You're a sweet-scented society idol!" Campbell howled. "This is a nice mess you've got us into! We can't close the theater for two weeks, because we haven't given any one in the company any notice. Our money is just about gone and we're up against it good and hard. It's up to you to soak that automobile and a few of those diamonds, and get us out of this clean!"

THE following week, as they were getting ready to close up, a moving-picture and vaudeville theater across the street erected a huge sign in three-foot letters, black in the day time and dazzling with electric lights at night:

MARGUERITE
BUFFINGTON
COMEDIENNE

The day the Lyric closed, Sylvester and Campbell were sitting in the office, going over the endless list of accounts, when a messenger boy brought in a package for the actor. It contained a few trinkets he had given to Miss Buffington. A folded piece of paper dropped on the floor and Campbell recognized on it the trade-mark of Morrison's theater. He grabbed it, opened it, read it, and handed it to Sylvester:

"Here, you unspeakable jackass, read this!" he said.

This is what the actor saw:

Dear Miss Buffington:

Here is a good line, if he gets too anxious to know who you are—I found it in a French novel: "I will tell you some time. But for now, let us live in the Springtime of our love, when everything is born again, when all the world is new, and there have been no yesterdays."

HENRY MORRISON.

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THE ALDERMAN'S VOYAGE

A TALE OF THE WISDOM OF WITLESS DICK

By

H. C. BAILEY

"A NOBLE city," said Captain Doricot simply. "I was born here."

Dick Rymingtowne sniffed. He had a versatility in inarticulate sounds. They were standing at the door of the Blue Bull tavern, a mean house, with walls crazy and crumbling, with door-jambs and window-frames so warped and eaten of dry rot and worm that they looked ready to snap. Yet there was no other house so well preserved or promising better living in all the lane. From the end of the vista, rosy sky pierced with masts, came a pungent quay-pool smell. So for two reasons or more Dick Rymingtowne sniffed at the city of Bristol.

Captain Doricot turned and looked up at him as you may see a terrier meditating mischief to a cow.

"My clown," quoth he, "my ditch-born, my thistle-eater, you made a noise, as I think."

"I've a nose, d'ye see."

It is beyond doubt that Doricot's repartee would have been masterly, but Providence was grudging. Two fellows, urged to the tavern door by an untimely thirst, jostled him as his mouth opened. So that what came forth was Italian oaths. Therewith he knocked their heads together and against the door-post. Swearing less politely, they fell upon him.

Dick Rymingtowne bent over the tumultuous, vociferous heap with large hands ready for action. In bulk Doricot was not much more than half either of his two foes. The purple and gold that covered his lean little body appeared through the contortions only in glimpses, like scraps of decoration on the somber frieze of the heavier men. But the yell that rose out of the swearing and writhing was from one of them. It was

IN THE September ADVENTURE there was a story called "Black Magic," with its scene laid in England just before the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The hero was of a kind new to fiction—Dick, a hulking lout of a Berkshire shepherd, generally regarded as a bit lacking in his wits. But the reader gradually sees that Dick is very far from lacking in his wits. Hidden under his stupid manner and appearance is a master mind in craft, generalship and knowledge of human nature.

In "Black Magic" Dick cleverly saves Gabriel Rymingtowne, lord of Assynton Manor, from the murderous plot of a relative who covets his estates and his daughter. It becomes evident that Dick loves Mary Rymingtowne. Therefore, he goes forth to win his fortune, and the reader has a hint of stirring future adventures on the high seas.

In "The Venture of Captain Doricot" (March) Dick meets with an adventurer who knows an opportunity for a rich voyage to the Orient, but has neither ship nor gold nor men. By force of wits and hands, they gain a sum of money and set out together for Bristol, each recognizing in the other a useful companion.

THE EDITOR.

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one of them who cast himself out of the fight and lay, feeling tenderly at his right arm and growling:

"No fair hold, I say, no fair hold!"

Then Doricot was seen kneeling on the other man's chest, while his two claw hands possessed the throat and he spat abuse that smarted. The man's face darkened, his struggling limbs were blind. Doricot sprang to his feet and laughed like an old woman and began to flick the dust from him with a lace handkerchief.

"Ye be fat, knaves," he purred. "But for the tallow on you, you had made in some sort a fight. Nay, but I never knew a brace hold out longer against Nick Doricot. God's wounds, I have a mind to you! I'll burn a pottle for you. Go in!"

They had come to their feet, they were making sulky eyes at him. He thrust them before him and hustled them into the tavern.

Dick Rymingtowne was left scratching his heavy shoulder against the wall. He seemed to find life uninteresting. It is probable that he never had much taste for adventure. His ascetically practical mind from first to last, as I take it, judged Doricot rococo and wasteful.

In a little while the two fellows came out again and rolled off in spirits. Doricot followed and cackled and tweaked Dick by the ear.

"Here's two more to our ship's company, my bully," quoth he. "And one a cooper, which I never thought to get for my twopence a day."

Dick shrugged.

"Cheap beasts is dear beasts. But you'm easy pleased, seemly. Any man that you can master be man enough for you."

"And what other virtue hast thou, prithee?" Doricot purred.

Before further strife, there puffed up a man all paunch, with face like a red full moon seen through a white mist of beard and whiskers.

"I ha' catched mun!" he panted. "There's a gunner for 'e. The Genoans hath none such, no, not Johnny Dory. Now I'll be after Geordy Goswen to your carpenter. There's a shifty man!"

Away he puffed while Doricot cheered him on.

"There's more of your dear bargains," Dick grumbled. "The gaffer was worn out while I was teething."

"Now rot thy marrow for a fool!" Doricot was honestly amazed. "It's the best mariner in England. He was boatswain to the Signor Cabota."

"To be sure, I thought he was Noah's."

Doricot cursed him awhile in gentle elaboration and then came back to affairs with "Here's our crew coming with a fair wind. Now we must look for our ship."

Dick's jaw dropped.

"What's your will?"

"A ship, dolt. Didst think I had one in my holsters?"

Dick shuffled his feet.

"You told as you had a ship found and waiting," he said heavily. "*Toby* 'twas to name, and high charged. Else I had never give 'e my money for a share in the venture. You'm——"

"The which pittance," Doricot snapped his fingers at it, "I have spent in luck-pennies for my crew. Well, sirrah?"

"You'm no honest man," said Dick stolidly.

"Oh, sweet, oh, rare!" Doricot struck at his ribs. "What's honesty to thee or me? What profit in an honest venture, sweet chuck? I begin as I would go on."

Dick would not be amused.

"You ha' no understanding o' me," he drawled. Then the heavy face twisted. "If 'e do think to pick a quarrel before I can pick a bit by it, you'm lost your way."

Doricot cackled and swore he was a jolly *camarado* and went off to the quay to seek, as he said, his ship. Dick stayed, scratching himself on the cabin door.

DOWN the lane came a gallant figure, a young man lilting with exuberant strength and the pride of life. Yet he was sedately clad in black and an earnest gravity sat heavy on his comely face. He looked wise beyond his years and proud of it. Altogether, from his well-turned legs to his visibly respectable soul, Dick judged him an exemplar to ambitious youth. But he turned into the tavern. As he passed, he gave Dick a glance which might have been no more than surprise that a fellow so plainly agricultural should lounge in the haunts of seamen, but which had at best no flattery in it.

Dick may have been annoyed, or he may have thought that such a virtuous person would be useful leaven to Doricot's battered, bibulous crew, or in his drowsy fash-

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ion he may have imagined a joke. Whatever the cause, he shuffled into the tavern and saw the good young man sitting at a table apart from common drinkers, with the tapster obsequious. Dick tapped him on the shoulder and, as he turned to display genially contemptuous surprise, drawled out:

"You'm a mariner?"

All the tavern stared. The good young man gave a laugh of condescension.

"Yes, my lord," he said.

The tavern laughed with him.

"Be you hired?" quoth Dick in the manner of a farmer at a sheep fair. "I've a good luck-penny for a willing lad."

Some of the tavern company laughed louder. There was an acidity in the good young man's smile. "Hie away back to thy pigs, good fellow," quoth he and turned away.

Dick tapped him on the shoulder and when he looked round drawled:

"Pig-sty to you."

The good young man shrugged and said:

"Have the fellow out, tapster!"

The tapster looked at Dick's bulk and shifted his feet and chose to hear the landlord calling.

Dick sat himself down at the table and leaned over it till his breath was on the good young man's cheek.

"Would 'e have me out yourself, now?" he invited.

The answer was a call for the landlord, and when he came leisurely from among the barrels behind the tin-covered counter:

"Look ye, my friend. You will have this fellow out, or me you will have no more at the Blue Bull."

"There now," says the landlord, "crack a quart and drown it."

"I have spoken," quoth the good young man.

"Well, to be sure!" the landlord meditated. "Wilful will to worse. For his master and he they spend like gentry. And you spend nought, save on victuals, which is no profit. So e'en good-day to you, Master Brook!"

"Captain Brook!" quoth the good young man haughtily, as he rose.

With contempt he looked round the tavern, which, indeed, but that its clients were seamen one and all, had no kinship with his respectability. Smelling strong of stale liquor, with dirty puddles in the sand of the floor, the plaster fallen from between the rafters, the plaster of the walls scrawled with crude and worse than crude devices, the Blue Bull made no pretense of decency. Its clients matched it well. Slovenly, ragged doublets, faces scarred and seamed and swollen, were the one fashion there.

"Good-day to you!" said Captain Brook, counted out money precisely and stalked on in dignity.

But from the door unfortunately he recoiled in disorder.

THROUGH the door came a shrill Italian oath and a "Give way to thy betters, thou cod's-head!" and Doricot came with a swagger, the fist that had discomposed Captain Brook making patterns in the air. Doricot halted on tiptoe and sniffed at him.

"A pretty fellow, God wot. I'll take thee to my cook's mate, dainty chops and thou."

Captain Brook muttered something, swept him aside and strode out.

"Look ye," quoth Doricot to the tavern, "there goes a quarrelsome fellow. A fellow that will never lie still till one slitteth his weasand for the sake of quiet."

There was laughter and the landlord chuckled,

"You ha' no luck with him, you nor your man."

"*Platt-il?*" Doricot blinked at Dick. "And what was your way of it, mynheer?"

"Nobbut asked un if a was a mariner," Dick drawled.

Again the tavern laughed:

"And him the youngest Captain out o' Bristol, and the proudest by all the length of his long shanks!"

"Now there's a sin!" cried Doricot. "What hath yon side of beef to be proud upon?"

"Nay, now, nay," the landlord protested, "and him new made the master of Alderman Fry's great ship."

"*Hein?*" Doricot cocked a meditative eye. "God help us, God help us, a mad world! That mother's darling to be master in a great ship! Why, no wonder he is beside himself!"

And yet again there was laughter, but the landlord shrugged.

"Nay, fair's fair. Charley Brook be no use to me, nor any man that makes his living out o' liquor. But it's a good seaman, my lad, and never wronged man nor woman neither. I wish ye all as honest!"

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"Now from all honest men and holy women, good Lord deliver us!" quoth Doricot.

A voice piped out above the alcoholic laughter: "Charley's none so dull. He can play St. John's night with a girl, I warrant him."

Doricot started round.

"What! d'ye tell me the fellow is a man? Who is the fool of a woman, then?"

Dick's sleepy eyes stared hard. He did not understand the pertinacious interest of Doricot in Captain Brook.

The owner of the piping voice, a lad with an old man's face, chuckled villainously.

"Why, 'tis Alderman Fry's red daughter Kate. A gloomy piece, to my thinking. But Charley hath been hand and glove with her this year agone. The old alderman had to hear nought of it, being so rich and proud and all. So they've a-kissed in the dark. But I've bore their tokens many a time."

"Women! Women!" Doricot rebuked the sex. "Ye were made to set fools o' horseback. So Mistress Kate hath beguiled her father to give his argosy to this saintly lubber?"

The lad laughed.

"You dunno Alderman Fry," said the landlord. "He'd give ne'er a groat to any man, no, not for his daughter nor her mother neither, without he made sure to get two back. Nay, Charley Brook stands on his own legs. The alderman reckons him a safe man. And there's not so many, saving your presence."

Doricot spat.

"I detest the tribe."

The lad took up the tale:

"Why, the old man dunno as they be courting. They was never to tell till Charley had a ship; the old un be that lofty. 'Tis why Charley paid me not to blab."

"Trusty fellow!" quoth Doricot. "But go to! I am weary of your Brook. 'Tis a vile liquor, water. Bring me a pint of sack!"

Over it, he relapsed into silence, a thing so rare in him that Dick stared the harder. When he rose and strutted out Dick followed him.

Doricot heard behind him the shuffle over the kidney stones and turned with a grin.

"What's your will, my innocent?"

"To know yourn."

Doricot grinned more widely.

"Go before, sirrah. Find me the way to master alderman's."

"Why, you'ld never part true lovers, surely?" Dick chuckled.

"Sirrah, I would part the devil from hell if I needed it!"

Dick gaped.

"Aw, that's terrible fine: but it don't mean so much, to my thinking. But that's like yourself, to be sure."

II

THE alderman lived in a street of staid magnificence. Each of the solid stone houses suggested permanent wealth and importance, but his was the largest and oldest. Doricot sucked in his lips.

"Here should be a turkey worth roasting," quoth he. "Go to, knock. Nay, not so, lubber. With a fandango and a thunderbolt, thus!"

The performance was hardly finished when the door flew open and Captain Brook rushed upon them. He thrust Doricot aside and stamped off. His respectable face was dark and he breathed hard. Doricot cackled:

"Look you, what an ox is a man in love! The poor bestial asks to be made steaks for his betters."

He repeated with his sword-hilt the fandango and the thunderbolt.

The answer came in the shape of a scurrying maid who cried out:

"Give us grace, give us grace, what's the matter?"

Doricot strutted in.

"Captain Nicholas Doricot out of Tripolis, the ports of Ægyptia and Syria. Lead me to the alderman."

He moved his sword in the scabbard and thrust it home again, whirled the cloak of purple and gold and struck an attitude.

The maid bobbed a frightened courtesy and fled. Doricot followed close on her heels and Dick on his, so that when she tapped on a door from behind which came stormy voices and, getting no answer, opened it, they saw the alderman starting from his chair to aim a blow at his daughter's ears. It went home and she reeled, and then, staying herself by the arras, tense with passion, she gazed at her father, cheeks and eyes and bosom telling one tale of hate.

Doricot strutted in daintily and sat himself down.

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"At your leisure, at your leisure," he waved his hand. "*La parole est à mademoiselle, je crois.*"

The alderman, with the aid of the devil's name, asked who he was.

"Nay, let my affair wait," quoth Doricot handsomely; "mademoiselle is impatient."

The alderman rushed at his daughter and caught at her wrist and dragged her out. Dick stared heavily after them. The alderman was opulently built with a wide and shiny face, bald at the brow, which glowed crimson. It was his mouth which distinguished him, a mouth of great extent with straight lips opening square. The reddish beard and moustachios were too closely cut to hide it. His daughter, too, had some red in her hair, some hint for all her youth, of his solidity, something of his development of jaw. But in her it was all softened and refined by more than sex or youth. Other blood than his had made her skin olive, her hair the darkest of russet, and her eyes.

"There's a brave minx," Doricot piped. "Damme, it warms my heart to cross her."

Dick gaped at him and leaned a shoulder against the door, all heavy, indolent stupidity. From the depths of the house, door-banging and the boom of the alderman's voice was heard. The alderman's emphatic feet came back. Other feet followed them and a rustle of skirts, and Dick's ear at the door heard a woman breathless:

"Mr. Fry, what have you done by her?"

"Set her where she may cool her wanton blood, mistress. Go to! you shall not come to her, neither. And if she be not wiser by the morning my Indian cane shall school her sides."

"Ha?" Doricot heard the alderman's roar, though he had missed the question. "To whom doth he prophesy?"

Dick shook a listless head, which had divined for itself that the woman was the mother. He heard her again.

"Nay, prithee let me speak with her. She——"

"She speaks with none but me, mistress. What! Have I forgot? You were malapert as she till I schooled you. Get you gone! Go in, I say, go in!"

There was some sound of movement and then a stifled cry and a laugh from the alderman. In a moment he entered, his large crimson face horribly discordant with its red beard. Doricot laughed his old woman's laugh:

"Take breath, take breath!"

"Who sent thee here?"

"My good will to thee." Doricot stood up. "You meet Captain Nicholas Doricot from Tripolis, Ægyptia and the ports of Syria."

"I can find me a score such on the quay. Away with thee. I've nought for broken men."

Doricot began to laugh.

"There spoke a fool. Look thee, sirrah fool, if we join hands for my venture I can put five hundred pounds to it."

The alderman was plainly startled, but he laughed contempt:

"Five hundred pounds of wind!"

Doricot flourished out a leather bag.

"You can count if we close."

"Be sure I shall," the alderman snapped, and then hesitated.

"*Plaît-il?*"

"Speak out. What is the venture?"

Doricot laughed.

"Hark 'e, my ruddy friend, I trust thee no more than I trust a horsefly. If I speak thee frankly, 'tis because I am well assured that none but Nick Doricot can venture my venture."

"I look for nought of thy speech or thy venture," the alderman sneered. "Speak or begone—all's one."

AFTER which compliments, they stared at each other and seemed far better friends.

"Now, master alderman, I take thee wise enough to know that for all the Portugals have found their way at sea by Bona Speranza, the most and the best of the spices of the Indies do come to us still overland to Ægyptia and the Syrias."

"My 'prentice lads know so much."

"*Bien!* On my last voyage, putting in to Malta after lemons for the scurvy, there lay a galley out of Alexandria changing prisoners from the Knights of St. John. We did some traffic of soap and nails with the infidels, and their Captain coming aboard us, I found him a renegade, an Englishman out of Watchet, that was carpenter aboard my first ship. Peter Drew is his name, who hath called himself Achmet Bey in their jargon. He was took with the *Jenny* out of Barnstaple off the Morea. A jolly fellow, but it was a skill in corn-cutting—natural

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to his trade—that saved his throat and after delivered him from the prisons.

"Now he is high among their Captains. We two, then, compounded together that I should voyage this Summer to Alexandria for a cargo of spices. For I may pay him a better price than they get from the Genoans or the Venetians—which be no better than leeches—and yet make a great profit. I appointed him time and place for his galley in a desolate haven of Ægyptia. I have a five hundred pound for the voyage, and there lacks me only a ship. How say you?"

The alderman sneered.

"A ship to sail after a fairy-tale!"

Doricot sprang up:

"*En avant*, Diccon! We have mistook. 'Tis no merchant, but a pedler."

The alderman bade him wait, but Doricot swept on and out. When they were well away he began to cackle gently to himself. Dick plodded on heavily. Doricot slapped him on the shoulder.

"The gudgeon nibbles, lad."

"I've no liking for he," quoth Dick. "I've a mind to go tell Master Brook his maid's locked in the cellar."

Doricot checked, his claw hand on Dick's arm, but then he began to cackle again.

"Good child," quoth he, "go and play!"

With long, silent strides the hulking form went away from him through the twilight. And Captain Doricot, it may surprise you to hear, then set himself to make up his crew with a fiery zeal that demanded he should lack no man by dawn.

Dick's work was more romantic. A question or so at the Blue Bull and on the quay discovered for him Brook's new lodging. There he found the good young man in darkness material and ideal. Dick asked for a candle and, when it came, grinned broadly at his melancholy.

"You!" Brook's surprise was dreary. "What do you want of me?"

"I ha' seen your maid. She'm a lusty piece. Give 'e good will. But you did ought to know as her old father hath beat her and locked her in the cellar and means to go beat her again o' morning unless she'll swear to have no more of 'e. I heard un threatening when we was there of our business. 'Twas your right for to know, being an unclean business to a loving man."

Brook stared, stumbled to his feet and rushed out. Dick shrugged. He conceived the situation beyond Brook's grasp. Brook should have asked for help. Nevertheless a curiosity as to the ways of other men with maids, which seems to have left him never, took him to see how Brook would fare. There was not much to see.

Brook came to the stately house and knocked and thrust himself past the answering servant before she could say him nay. In a little while the calm of the night was disturbed by angry voices, Captain Brook passionate, the alderman menacing and brutal. A little longer and the voices were shouting, the door opened again to show a struggle and Captain Brook, propelled by the alderman's 'prentices and serving men, was hurled out. Before he had picked himself up, the door was banged and barred. He could think of nothing better to do than pick his hat out of the kennel and slink away.

At this moment, as I take it, Dick's contempt for him was overwhelming, but it begat no favor for the alderman. On the contrary, chastisement for the alderman appeared a duty demanded by the righteous scheme of things. Dick lounged along Maryport Street, and where he found the kidney stones loose he pouched them. Coming again to the corner by the alderman's house, he tried the big stones set to keep cartwheels from the wall, found one give, and marched off with it and set it down by the alderman's back door.

Then he slouched round the corner again and with speed the kidney stones found each a billet in a different window. There was a very volley of shattering glass. Before the assaulted household rushed out he had retired easily from his strategic position at the corner to another street. While 'prentices and serving men ranged this way and that, he picked up his big stone and hurled it at the back door. A panel gave before it and a hinge, with a hoarse shriek of rent timber which brought answering shouts. Then at last Dick ran.

Safe back at the Blue Bull, he found Doricot talking to half a dozen tarry men while he supped off herrings and mulled ale. The half-dozen were enlisted in as many minutes and bidden be ready to sail at dawn. Then Doricot turned to Dick and heard his tale of Brook's disaster and the bombardment and cackled continuously.

"I thought it would keep un good and wakeful," Dick explained.

"You think more than you look, my lad,"

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quoth Doricot, looking at him keenly. "It might make the señor believe that our Brook had a party to help him."

"Aw now," Dick gaped. "You'm so sharp in your wits."

Doricot pinched his ear and cackled, and ordered ale for him and a rasher.

III

IN THE morning early, a letter came for Doricot that bade him go hastily to the alderman, who had thought of his venture and would speak of it again. Doricot slapped the paper.

"Our gudgeon hath bitten," quoth he. "Come, my bully," and off they went.

The wealthy house had an air of dissipation. In daylight the broken windows became exaggerated. Folks loitered and gazed and gaped. A sturdy porter opened in the maid-servant's stead and shut it again sharply. The alderman was waiting for Captain Doricot.

"I commend him," quoth Doricot.

The alderman awaited them in a severe little room amid papers and was very much the merchant.

"A good morning, Captain. I thank you for your speedy coming." The alderman coughed and looked at Dick. "Do we need the lad, Captain Doricot?"

"*Quoi?*" Doricot started. "I have no secrets, alderman."

"Why, I mean, what is he?"

"If I knew that, I might cut his throat. It's either more a fool than I want or more a knave than I can use."

The alderman showed no satisfaction.

"Is he your friend or your servant, sir?"

"Neither, I thank God."

"We might be better without him," the alderman suggested through amazement.

"At your pleasure," Doricot shrugged. "He will hear as much one side the door as the other."

The alderman made signs of despair.

"I take it, then, that you two are one."

"As much as St. George and the dragon. But I take it that you have some desperate iniquity in hand?"

"Fie, sir," the alderman laughed. "You mock me. It's no more than your own venture." He paused. "Which I'll not hide from you hath, after thought, liked me better than I would hastily allow. You know the Levant, Captain Doricot?"

Doricot snapped his fingers. "From Jaffa to Cavo Mattapan, from Constantinople to Alexandria in Ægyptia, as I know Avon mud, or Barnstaple bar, or Sutton pool."

The alderman coughed and became more geographical, but Doricot overwhelmed him with geography. He tried to assert himself:

"Now as touching seamanship——"

In the sputter of an Italian oath Doricot turned upon Dick:

"My Achates, I have lived to hear a fat pedler call me lubber. I have lived too long, or he hath." He approached the alderman, menacing. "My penny-wise, have your long ears heard tell of old Will Gunson?"

The alderman bowed before the name, the name of one who had been paymaster of the King's navy and sent a famous voyage to Crete. Doricot flourished out a parchment with Gunson's superscription.

"This is very good," the alderman hardly restrained himself from geniality. "Now sir, of this venture of yours what do you hope?"

"*Pardieu*, sweet oils and cotton wools, pepper and cinnamon and galls and other spices, enough to freight a ship of three hundred tons burden."

"Say you so? And you will adventure a five hundred pounds upon the voyage?"

"Give me a great ship well found and freighted and I will pay you five hundred pound, and of all the profits of the venture one fourth shall be yours and three-fourths mine."

"It is a poor pittance," said the alderman pensively. "What commodities do you seek for your freight?"

"As I told you, soap and nails; which are nought to us here, but most precious to the infidels. So that we get like Diomedes armor of gold for armor of bronze. You may also provide me a parcel of calfskins."

"It is a poor pittance," the alderman repeated. "But there's good service you could do me."

"Shall I marry your daughter, señor?"

The alderman flushed.

"Prithee, let my daughter's name be. If I give you ship of mine, sir, there's a fellow I would have you take with you."

Doricot looked at him with narrowing eyes:

"Ay, Bristol folk have been blithe kidnappers this thousand year. Well, what's this piece of man's flesh?"

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"Sir, it's an insolent, masterless man: one Brook, a fellow I have made out of nothing, which besets me, ay sir, with wanton violence. I would have you get him aboard with you."

"And?" Doricot sneered. "And?"

"And leave him far from me and mine."

"With the Turks or the sharks. What matter to a godly alderman? So be it. Write off Master Brook. Where's the ship?"

The alderman laughed.

"You are a quick man, Captain Doricot. Understand me, I want no noise of this about the town."

"Now that's godly," quoth Doricot.

SO IT was settled. The alderman became almost jovial about the details. He had perhaps not hoped that the venture would discover such sober plans behind its queer scheme when he determined that Doricot would serve to rid him of Captain Brook. A piratical fellow who could be reasonably commercial was a discovery that exalted his spirits. He grew as eager to plan the voyage and the trading as to get Brook under hatches.

There was a ship provisioned and watered and ready to sail—the ship of which Brook himself should have been master. She had no cargo aboard, for she was meant to go round to Plymouth in ballast and fill her hold with Tavistock kersies. So it would be easy to furnish her swiftly with the soap and nails for Doricot's venture. The alderman boasted that he would have all ready in three days. But he was anxious to get Brook out of his way still sooner. Could Doricot find his own crew? Doricot swore to find crew enough for Master Brook in an hour. He would see the ship and if she liked him he would engage to have Master Brook aboard her in the bilboes that night. The alderman chuckled and then thought of caution:

"You must needs take him warily. I doubt he hath some sturdy friends to his friends."

"I also, monsieur," quoth Doricot, and looked at the alderman queerly. "Fear not. He shall go aboard as quietly as the sun sets. Much about the same time."

"After all," said the alderman, "he hath none of note to stand by him in Bristol, being a Bridgwater man. So there will be none to seek him."

"God help whosoever comes a-seeking aboard my ship!" quoth Doricot.

"I will come aboard after nightfall," said the alderman, "and see that you have him safe. Then we can draw out the order for your freight and the voyage."

"We will take right good order, mynheer," quoth Doricot.

"Now I will give you warrant for the ship-keepers, and one of my lads shall go with you."

"*S'il vous plaît*," quoth Doricot.

So Dick and he went aboard the *Toby*. You must not imagine her beautiful. She was short and she was wide. If you can conceive a barge with wooden castles at bow and stern you will have some notion of her lines. But Doricot smacked his lips over her and bade Dick away to the Blue Bull to bring boatswain and crew. You see them coming over the side, a tattered, hard-worn company. As he lounged on the poop by Doricot, Dick sniffed at them loudly.

"Here be scarecrows enough for a county," quoth he, and waited an answer.

But Doricot's eyes were gazing away and ahead. It is possible that Dick was not ill satisfied. The line of Doricot's vision led straight to a brace of long guns in the waist of the ship. She was, for her kind, well armed.

Now, the alderman was impatient. The alderman had a wife and his daughter a mother, whereby the affair was complicated. Impatient to see the detested Brook in irons, he could not wait for dark. As soon as the sun was down, he went hurrying to the quay. For a night and a day, his daughter, locked contumacious in the dark, had been given nothing better than bread and water. He was hardly out of the house before her mother grasped at the chance to spread her a richer meal.

Laden with tearful sentiment and baked meats the mother opened the cellar door. She had but just set down her tray, she had only begun to pour forth her sympathy, when the passionate daughter, without one filial word, thrust her affections aside and flung open the door and darted out. Before the mother had become able to understand that anything had happened, the daughter was in the street and a hundred yards away.

Of course she sought her lover. In a tumult of exultation and half-gratified anger and eager passion, she made for the Blue Bull. You know why Brook was not there. Its landlord grinned interest from ear to ear

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as he told her where to find him. And so in the darkest twilight, at the hour when all honest folk were at supper, she came to Brook's lodging and his arms.

SOME time before, the alderman had gone aboard his ship and found Doricot dreaming over the flood tide.

"Well, sir, well, what's done?" he cried.

Doricot woke with a start and stared at him as if he were a miracle, and at last began to grin.

"You are a cock that crows at midnight," quoth he, and strutted away. He spoke briefly with his fat red boatswain, who went forward for a half-dozen men, and he turned to Dick. "Here's for you, my lad. See they get mynheer out of the house daintily, and Antony will answer for the rest. But he'll take orders from you. No noise about it, or we are fast aground. But it's business you were made for."

"Thank 'e for nought," said Dick, but he dropped into the boat, where they had a parcel of small cords and a sail and a wad of oakum.

It was near flood tide and the *Toby* lay in the stream.

So through the darkest twilight, or the first of the night, he came with his company to Brook's lodging. He chuckled to see light in it.

"Bide you here," quoth he to the boatswain, "and if a will come out quietly, do 'e take mun as a comes. And if a will not be a good fellow, I'll whistle to 'e for to come up."

The boatswain drew his men on either side the door.

Dick went in as quiet as a cat and asked no one's leave to open the door on Captain Brook, who was thereby discovered with Kate Fry on his knee. Which of the three was most amazed you may hardly guess. Which was most amused there is no doubt, for when Dick with a great chuckle said, "Give 'e joy and give me leave. There's a good fellow below stairs, a merchant out o' Plymouth, wants speech of 'e and I would not bring him up with mistress here."

Brook scowled at him, and Kate, with her face all crimson, stared wonder and fear and clutched at her man.

"Will 'e come down now?" Dick entreated. "I think a hath some business for 'e, having come by Bridgwater."

Captain Brook was visibly torn between disgust and distrust and surprise.

"I know no man to Plymouth," he muttered.

"Nor do I, to be sure," said Dick cheerily.

Brook frowned amazement and hesitated and made a step forward. The woman clung more closely.

"I'll not go down!" he cried. "Who is he?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders and whistled. Then he laughed.

"Why, look 'e, he do know that, not I."

Feet came up the stair. Brook started forward and came upon the bulk of Antony, the boatswain.

"What's your errand?" he cried, recoiling.

A great arm wrapped him round tenderly. A mouthful of oakum was thrust upon him. He was swept off his feet; he had hardly begun to plunge and writhe, before alert hands had cords all about him. Like a plank and as impotent, he was passed from hand to hand down the stair.

As the woman saw, Dick clapped his hat over her mouth and held her. She thrust at him and struggled fiercely and struck and writhed to win her head free and scream.

"Oh, be easy," said Dick. "Never beat a willing horse, my dear."

The boatswain caught her wrists. "Nay, you'm naughty," said he. "What's to do, my son?"

"Why, would 'e part a lass from her man?" Dick chuckled.

"I do allow she'm asking to be took." The boatswain scratched his bald head. Then he too chuckled. "'Twill be pretty to hear the Captain swear."

So they tied her up in the sail and carried her out.

Dick lingered to look round the room for anything worth taking; whereby he was some little after the others and, though they had been most seamanlike quiet about their business, was nearly in trouble. For as he went down the stairs he met the mistress of the house, who, having eaten her own supper, was coming to clear away Brook's.

"Servant, sir," says she, and plainly wanted to know what he was doing.

Dick nodded.

"Captain Brook hath just took his lass to see some friends out of Bridgwater. Aboard the *Mary Ann*."

And with a quiet conscience he went his way.

To a friend, who, most unfriendly, recog-

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nized him in spite of the dark, the boatswain grumbled against lubbers who drank themselves silly and had to be carried aboard. So easily they came to their boat.

If they had been longer about it, Doricot complained afterward, the alderman would have done with the world that night. For the alderman made himself so abominable with nervous iteration of fear that everything had gone wrong. When oars were heard through the dark, when the boat came alongside, he was all but into the river with peering at her. He was thrust aside without mercy, and by dim lantern-light they made fast and the boatswain heaved himself aboard.

"Have you done your business?" quoth Doricot.

"Ye will say so," the boatswain chuckled, and Dick came aboard.

Doricot clapped him on the shoulder with a "Good boy!" and he grinned and the two dumb bodies were hauled on deck.

"*Gottes teufels höllel*" Doricot cried. "Two! Two! *Viejo diablo da!* Give me light, I say!" He tore the sail back from the woman, he snatched at a lantern and thrust it at her face. Then with a cackling laugh he stood up straight and clutched at Dick. "My sweet babe!" he said.

The alderman thrust through the crew and all but fell as he peered down, and then screamed out, half-articulate:

"Shameless baggage! Ah, you blundering fools that you are! And you——"

"*Doucement! Doucement!*" Doricot slapped at his mouth and he spluttered and struck the hand away, swearing. It closed on his shoulder.

He bent over the two who lay there helpless, bewildered, yet fierce-eyed.

"Ah, you baggage, your sides shall be sore for this! You——"

"*Madre de Dios!*" Doricot cried. "You have no variety!" He jerked the alderman back as he kicked the legs from under him. "Have him and the other man in the bilboes. The woman to the spare cabin. What, lively, I say!"

IV

SO THE alderman found himself chained up in the dark with the man he had plotted to chain. What they said to each other is no matter for this decent tale. And to them and the dazed woman alone in the cabin came the call of the boatswain's pipe and the groaning of capstan and cable. Out with the ebb the *Toby* sailed away from Bristol town.

Twenty-four hours the prisoners lay in their quarters, punctiliously provided with prisoner's fare, for each two-thirds a seaman's ration of beer and bread and salt horse. It appears that they ate little. The ship was running into a golden sunset with the swell of the cliffs to port all a red glow, when Doricot, who had conned her all day like a man in a trance, condescended to wake and speak.

"Have all the pretty birds to my cabin, my lad," said he to Dick at his elbow.

"What's to do?" Dick drawled, who was something dispirited by the ship's pitching.

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows, my innocent?" Doricot cackled.

In the great cabin Doricot lounged at his ease, his small legs spread over a bench of cushions. There, two seamen brought him Kate Fry, and he rose and waved them away and bowed to her.

"What do you want of me?" she cried.

"You allow me to be frank? Then I profess I never saw a woman of your years whom I wanted so little."

He sat down again and reflected that the cabin's green paint was hard upon her, for she was very pale.

"What do you mean to do with us?"

"That, madonna, is what I am trying to find out."

Before she could make anything of that, Dick led in the alderman and Captain Brook, dirty, disheveled and weary, both. The alderman barked out:

"You lying scoundrel!"

He seemed to expect Doricot to fall down before him.

Doricot waved a hand:

"Come, my friends, let us understand ourselves. It was convenient to me to take you. But you are now no more use. If I let you go, what will you do for me?"

One and all they appeared to think him impudent. The alderman broke out:

"I'll have thee hanged for a pirate if there's law in England!"

Doricot cackled a little.

"Monsignor, if that's your mind, go on deck and take a look at English land. For thou'lt never see it again."

"What, sirrah?" the alderman started up. "Would you murder me?"

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"Nay, that were waste. There's many a port in Barbary where a good fat fellow like thee will fetch a price. Nay, you shall fare no worse than you designed for Master Brook. It's a manly life, as they say, in the Moorish galleys."

The alderman collapsed, while his daughter and Brook glared at him.

"Fine fortune you ha' made for us all by your plots with this knave!" quoth Brook.

"Fie, fie!" Doricot protested. "The godly fellow hath made himself a sweetly just end."

"This is mad!" the alderman panted feebly. "You could not play such a trick, sir. There be too many to miss me."

"They could seek thee in the galleys."

"Sail back to Bristol and I'll hold thee scatheless. I'll call it a jest."

Doricot laughed loud:

"That were a jest indeed. The ship is mine now, señor, and I would ha' gone through hell to get her."

The alderman seemed to shrink.

"Put me ashore at least," he wailed. "What ill have I done you? My God! is it not enough that you rob me of my best ship? Put me ashore!"

"Will you buy yourself? The Moors would buy you. Are you worth a bill for five hundred pound?"

The alderman seemed to diminish again.

"You shall have it," he gasped.

"And as much more for your daughter," said Doricot carelessly.

But the alderman flushed again and started forward and snarled:

"Not a penny! She hath made her bed. Let her lie on it!"

Doricot shrugged his shoulders.

"*Dixit*," quoth he. "She may go to Algiers for him." And he turned to Brook. "Well, my lord, and what will you bid for yourself?"

"You are a vile, treacherous knave!" said Brook, stubbornly. "I'll make no bargain with you. You can do your worst upon me and I trust in God to see you punished."

"Fie, fie, you are not kind," Doricot complained. "I'll not deal hard with you."

"I'll make no bargain with you," Brook cried. "I pray God to call you to account."

"These saints!" Doricot shrugged, and turned to the woman. "Prithee bring him to his senses, mistress."

"I would hate him if he yielded to you!" she cried fiercely.

Then Doricot gave a great laugh and sprang out of the cabin, crying as he went, "Back the foresail! Lower the cockboat!"

From the deck he shouted to his prisoners, "Come up and I will show you a thing."

When they came, something dazed, the ship lay hove to and a boat was under her port quarter. To Brook and the woman Doricot made a magnificent bow:

"*Monsieur et madame*, you have spirit and—who knows?—perhaps your children may have brains. There is your boat and there's Lynmouth beach. Give you good night." Half by force, for they were halting and dumb with amazement, he had them overside. The alderman made to follow them. "Cast off!" Doricot cried. "Foresail halyards!" The ship began to slip through the water again. He embraced the alderman. "Mynheer, you go a voyage with me."

The alderman gave a wild cry and rushed to the bulwarks and gazed desperately at the boat, at the red cliffs beyond; but already the boat was far away. He turned trembling.

"What is it? What do you mean?"

"To teach you," quoth Doricot, "to traffic in man's flesh."

"Do you mean to make a slave of me?"

"No, señor, to make you a free man. For which you must have a master. Get forward. Give him a swab."

Into the forecastle the alderman was hustled and set to swab it out. So he began his voyage. So began the famous voyage of the *Toby*.

But in the sternwalk Dick's practical mind was complaining.

"'Tis all mighty pretty, to be sure. But you ha' got no cargo after all."

"I never wanted any," Doricot cackled.

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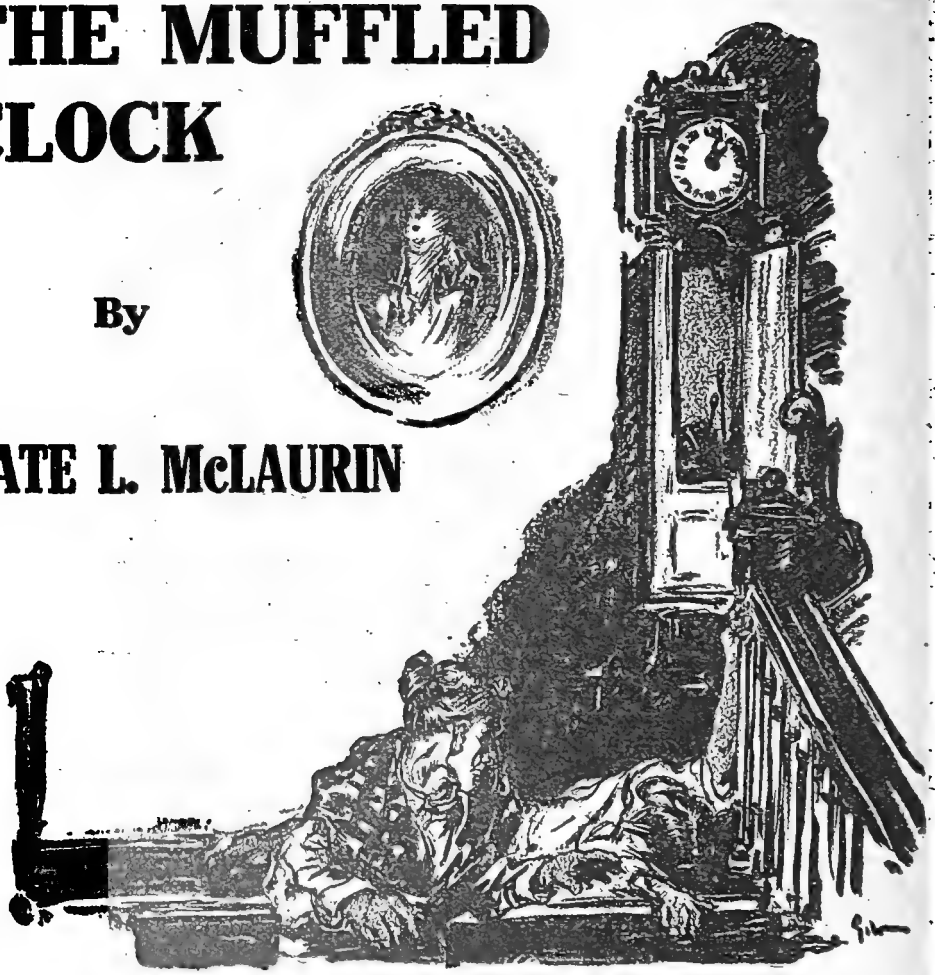
THE MUFFLED CLOCK

By

KATE L. McLAURIN



CHAPTER I

IN RESPONSE TO A TELEGRAM

I HAVE never been able to sleep well in a strange room, therefore when I did drop off it was into such a light doze that the sound of cautious footsteps passing my door made me sit up suddenly—wide awake. Some one was going down the stairs; I could hear the faint creak of the boards as they descended, and then the old clock on the first landing boomed out "one—two" and no more. I knew that it was wrong, for it was after two when I closed my eyes.

This thought had scarcely time to swim through my brain when I heard a shriek; it rang out shrill and terrible, and the intense darkness about only increased the feeling of terror that assailed me. I sprang out of bed, flung open my door and peered into the hall. Absolute blackness greeted me and I stood for a moment, hearing nothing, feeling nothing but the wild beating of my own heart. Then a low moan broke the stillness; it seemed to come from some one lying on the floor a few feet before me. I went quickly into my room, lighted a candle and returned to the hall.

"Aunt Hannah!" I cried.

The old lady was stretched on the floor, one hand pressed to her heart, the other clutching the railing in an effort to raise herself. Her face was twitching in agony, and at the sound of my voice she opened her eyes. I knelt by her and she tried to speak to me, but her strength was going fast. With a great effort she gasped out:

"The clock, the clock—Mary——"

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The voice trailed off into silence. I lifted her in my arms and spoke to her softly. It was useless—Aunt Hannah was dead!

IN THE light of the sudden and mysterious death of my Aunt Hannah, it becomes necessary that I hark back a bit, explain my presence in this lonely house and my relation to the dead woman, and, above all, how an affair so strange and tragic shaped itself in the quiet village and caught in a web of sorrow and suspicion the innocent as well as the guilty.

As I said, I am a home-keeping man and, whenever possible, avoid strange surroundings. Nothing causes me greater discomfort than to be obliged to spend the night away from my own pleasant quarters. Imagine, then, my dismay when I received a telegram from my aunt asking me to come to her at once. She was seriously ill and wanted to see me before the end came. Now, Aunt Hannah lived up in a little Vermont town, and, at the least, I should be away two nights—two sleepless nights must I suffer for an old aunt whom I hadn't seen since I was a child.

My memory of that time was of a distinctly unpleasant quality.

I fancy that I would long since have forgotten the existence of the lady had it not been that on every birthday I received a card from her which invariably read:

"I hope this year finds you a wiser and more industrious man."

At first the regularity of the thing got on my nerves, then it grew to be a joke, and at last I began to think it over and each year ask myself the same question. I grew, as it were, to render an account to that card, and if Aunt Hannah helped one's mind along the road of true self-valuation, her life was not in vain.

When her telegram came, my first impulse was to wire her that it would be impossible for me to come, but so strong are the conventions that I had not the moral courage to refuse the request of what might be a dying woman, and I telegraphed that she might expect me on the first train.

My trip was uneventful and I arrived in the village some time after seven. It had been a blustery Autumn day and the night had come on dark and wild. There was one other passenger to quit the train, and as there was only one carriage at the station we drove up together. It was a long drive, and for the want of something else to do I observed my fellow traveler—that is, I observed as much of him as was possible. He had on a great storm-coat, the collar of which was turned up about his ears and face, concealing all but a pair of sharp, ferret-like eyes. He carried a stout walking-stick and a small case which resembled the kind used by country doctors who must be their own pharmacists.

It has always been a habit of mine to try to make out a man's trade by his appearance or some trick of manner, and I was gazing attentively at the stranger with this object in view when he looked up and evidently resented my interest, for his face sank lower in his collar.

At this juncture the driver turned to inform me that we were at Mrs. Hill's, and I thought I saw a flash of interest pass over the face of the man opposite me, but it may have been the effect of the lantern which the driver held up to help me alight from the carriage. I paid my fare and turned to open the rustic gate. A long stretch of trees lined the approach to the house and made the way so dark that I kept on the path only by the sound of the gravel under foot.

I have said once before that I had not seen my aunt since my childhood, when my mother and I paid her a visit that ended in a very abrupt fashion. One night I was put to bed, and, as usual, my mother went down stairs to talk to my aunt. Soon afterwards she returned, dressed me hurriedly, and together we left the house with no word of farewell to my aunt. Mother was a very reserved woman and never explained this occurrence to me: indeed she never afterward spoke of her sister, and it was only after her death that the cards began coming on my birthdays. It is strange how all of this came back to me as I walked up the path and stood waiting for some one to answer my knock. I had nearly to break the door in before it was opened by a little old man who held a lamp high over his head as he peered out.

"Who be you?" he asked in a high-pitched voice.

"I am Mrs. Hill's nephew, John Graham."

"Oh," he answered, and I had a feeling that he wanted to shut the door in my face.

"Didn't my Aunt get my wire?"

"To be sure. Come in," he said, none too graciously.

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I ENTERED and he led the way to the living-room, which was a large, bleak affair lighted only by an oil-lamp on the center-table. There was a great fireplace at one side before which stood an old-fashioned settle. An old piano, a couch and a few chairs completed the furnishings of this unattractive room.

"How is my aunt?" I asked, as he followed me into the room.

"She is quite bad, but she is asleep now. I guess you will have to wait a spell to see her."

"Who are you?" I asked. The man's quiet but definite manner of putting me off annoyed me.

"I am Hiram Potts. We have been with Mrs. Hill a long time. Mrs. Potts will get your supper when you are ready."

"I don't care for supper until I have seen my aunt; she wired me to come at once, and I am not here to waste time!"

"But you won't wake her, will you? If you knew how little sleep she has had for a week you wouldn't have the heart."

The old fellow looked at me with great sincerity in his eyes as he said this, and I was half convinced that his motive for detaining me was a real concern for Aunt Hannah.

"Very well, I will wait a while, but I want to go to my room."

I hadn't been in the house for twenty-five years, and yet, as we started up the stairs and reached the first landing, I instinctively looked for the old clock that had been one of my wonders as a child. There it still stood, tall and solemn against the wall, and as we passed it struck the hour—it was eight o'clock.

And my room—how it brought back memories of my mother and the night we fled from this house! It was the same great room with the four-post bed, the black walnut wardrobe and dresser. Old Potts put down the lamp and repeated his invitation to supper, this time I accepted and said I would be down as soon as I had washed up a bit. He was inclined to wait for me, but I hustled him out and shut the door after him.

I waited until the last sound of his steps died away, then opened my door and crossed swiftly to the room opposite, which I remembered as the one Aunt Hannah used to occupy. I turned the knob and found myself in a room the exact counterpart of the one I had just left. There was a fire burning in the grate and it gave the room all the light it had. In a dim corner I could see the huge bed and, creeping near, made out a figure lying in it. All of a sudden a high, querulous voice with a touch of terror in it called out:

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Aunt Hannah—John Graham."

"Why didn't Potts tell me you were here?"

"He said you were asleep."

"He always lies. He knows I haven't slept for a week—how can I sleep when—Light one of those candles and come nearer!"

I obeyed her and as I bent over her I realized how time had changed the large domineering woman I had known and feared as a child. She was gaunt and terrible-looking as she lay propped up in the bed.

"I suppose you've no use for me," she began.

"My coming to you doesn't look like that, does it?"

"Oh, I am not poor, and you are a young man. What did your mother tell you about me?"

"She never spoke of you after we left your house."

"Mary always was secretive, but it will pay her this time. When I am dead you will —Who's at the door?"

"No one." But even as I spoke I saw a shape moving in the darkness.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It is Potts—he is always listening."

I walked over to the door and looked all about, but could find no one. Whoever had been there had disappeared at my first question. I returned to Aunt Hannah and found her lying still with her eyes closed, and for a moment I feared the end had come. I ran to the hall and called Potts, who came rushing up the stairs as fast as his crooked legs would carry him.

"What is it?" he asked in a voice full of alarm.

"Quick, get a doctor! She is worse."

"I told you not to disturb her; she is very bad." He entered the room and went straight to the bed; bending over it he cried, "Oh, ma'am, how are you?"

"Don't stop here, but go for a doctor; can't you see she is sinking?" I said impatiently.

He straightened up and looked at me:

"A doctor can't do her any good; she will come out of it all right, if she ain't excited."

"Is there a doctor near here?"

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"Yes, Doctor Bean lives next door, but Mrs. Hill wouldn't want him."

"Why not?" I demanded.

The only answer I could get from him was a shrug of the shoulders, so without further word to him I ran down-stairs and out of the front door. A fine cold rain had set in, and I stood for a moment on the steps, shivering from the cold, then it occurred to me that I had not asked Potts on which side Doctor Bean lived. I looked to the right and left, but the trees and the night shut out whatever house was near. I turned into the house and met Potts at the foot of the stairs.

"She feels better now and wants to be alone," he said to me.

Aunt Hannah's words came back to me: "He always lies."

"Where does the doctor live?" I asked.

"Just to the right, but it won't do any good to get him; Mrs. Hill never wanted him about."

"Mrs. Hill is in no condition to judge what is best for her!"

With this I left him.

CHAPTER II

MRS. POTTS SERVES SUPPER

THE house next door was some distance away, and by the time I knocked at the doctor's door I felt that I had covered much ground. The cold rain and my lack of an overcoat doubtless made the distance seem longer than it really was. My knock was answered by a young woman, and in response to my inquiry she said she would see if her father were home. I followed her into a cheerful hall and waited while she went for her father.

The sudden shift from the bleak, gloomy home of my aunt to this bright, warm place was more than agreeable, and the gracious manner of the girl almost made me forget Potts. In a few moments she returned:

"Father is still out, but I expect him any moment; will you wait: or shall I give him a message?"

"I wanted Doctor Bean to see Mrs. Hill as soon as possible."

"Oh, are you Mr. Graham?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Why, I sent you the wire. I didn't mean to tell you that—I am sure Mrs. Hill wouldn't like it—but you will never tell, will you? I can depend on you?"

"Absolutely."

For the first time I was glad that Aunt Hannah had sent for me.

"I am so glad that you are here," she went on, "for Mrs. Hill needs some one to look after her; those old people are too ignorant to be of any real use, and I am not sure that they are trustworthy."

"To look at Potts is enough to make any one distrust him," I answered.

"At that, I think he is the better of the two."

"Who is the other?"

"His wife—haven't you seen her?"

"No, but I will when I have the supper that Potts has been urging on me. If you will ask your father to come over, I will go back; my aunt may need me."

"I will tell him as soon as he comes in—" she hesitated. "I think I ought to tell you that Mrs. Hill and my father are not friends, and I am not sure that she would like your coming for him, but if it is necessary——"

"It is a matter of life and death, I believe."

"Then he will come."

Once back at Aunt Hannah's I found the door locked and had to repeat my first performance before Potts opened it.

"Why in the world did you lock me out?" I demanded.

"Mrs. Hill is very particular about having the door locked," he answered. "Will you have supper now?"

"As soon as I have seen how my aunt is," and without stopping I went on up the stairs.

Aunt Hannah was sleeping, as Potts had said, a quiet, natural sleep. Her breath came regularly and there was almost a look of peace on her face. I tiptoed out of the room and joined Potts in the hall. He led the way to the dining-room, where there was more light than the rest of the house boasted of, and I began to think that I had been working up a tragedy from nothing.

The door from the kitchen opened and Mrs. Potts entered with a steaming dish in her hand which she placed on the table after giving me a stiff bow. She was the antithesis of Potts—a large, powerful woman, with deep-set eyes, a beak-like nose, and a mouth that expressed decision of character. I was quite sure that the husband was the better—at any rate, the softer—of the two.

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The cold and excitement had given me an appetite and I was prepared to eat heartily. Potts sat opposite me and contented himself with a bowl of milk and bread. I had an impulse to ask him if that was all Mrs. Potts allowed him to eat at that hour of the night, and I did ask if he wouldn't join me in a cup of coffee. He smiled—evidently fond of coffee, but, before replying, gave his wife a questioning look.

She bruskly said, "He'd never get to sleep if he drank that."

There was a look on her face that gave me a sudden distaste for the food; even now, I can't tell what it was, but a voice that I never disobey said, "Don't." To cover up my rudeness I said that I was a poor sleeper myself and would follow Mr. Potts's lead. Then I leaned over and poured from his pitcher a glass of milk, and I could swear that, as I did so, there was a flash of disappointment in Mrs. Potts's eyes.

I DID not prolong my stay in the dining-room, but I must confess that I stayed long enough to ask a few questions about the Doctor's family. All the satisfaction I got was that Dr. Bean was a widower with one child, the daughter that I met. She kept house for her father and was full of "new-fangled notions," Mr. Potts said. At this moment there came a loud knock at the front door. Mr. and Mrs. Potts exchanged glances and she started to answer it. I followed, as I was expecting the Doctor, and feared her reception of him.

"What do you want?" she asked, as she peered through the crack of the door.

"I want to see Mr. Graham," and I recognized the voice of the Doctor's daughter and stepped forward in time to prevent Mrs. Potts from shutting the door in her face.

"I am here, Miss Bean; won't you come in?"

"No, thank you," she answered, "but I was afraid you might be waiting for Father, and he has just sent word that the case has taken a serious turn and he may be out all night."

"My aunt is much better now, but thank you for letting me know. May I see you home?"

"No, it is only a short distance, and, Mr. Graham, somehow I feel that you are needed here to-night." And she was gone.

Mrs. Potts had stood by during this talk, but Miss Bean spoke in such a low voice that I am not sure that she heard; however, she did break out with:

"Mrs. Hill wouldn't like them people fooling around here."

"While my aunt is ill, Mrs. Potts, I shall do as I think best."

She made no reply and disappeared into the rear of the house. I went back and forth to Aunt Hannah's room, always to find her asleep. Once she opened her eyes and smiled at me,

"I can sleep now that you are here, and it is good—to-morrow we will go over things."

But alas, for her there was to be no to-morrow!

After this speech I held her hand until she again dropped off to sleep, then returned to my room to go to bed. This was after midnight and I lay awake for hours longer, rolling and tossing and exploring all of the inner recesses of my mind as one will when the body is tired and the brain actively awake. The great gloomy room and the intense stillness of the country, broken only by the moan of the wind and the swish of the rain against the window-pane, were not conducive to sleep.

I must have dozed off, for, the next I knew, furtive steps were passing my door, then the clock struck—one—two—and some one screamed. Five minutes later I was holding Aunt Hannah in my arms—dead!

CHAPTER III

THE CLOCK

I PICKED Aunt Hannah up and carried her to her bed, the room being completely dark save for the candle that I had left in the hall. This threw a faint, quivering light, which only added to the weirdness of the scene. As I laid her down I heard a hurrying below stairs, and in a few seconds Potts was at my side.

"Oh, Mr. Graham, what has happened?"

"She is dead, or at least I think she is. Go for a doctor quick!"

"Oh, no, she wouldn't like it!" he answered.

"None of that!" I said sternly. "Go for Doctor Bean at once!"

"I dare not. I'm afraid to leave the house."

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"Afraid of what?" I demanded.

"Why—I can't go out with my rheumatism at night."

I knew that he was lying to me, but I felt it would be useless to argue with him, so, bidding him stay where he was, I started for the Doctor.

"Be careful, Mr. Graham!" he called after me.

"Of what?" I asked impatiently.

"Nothing; only things seem to be going so queer."

At the foot of the stairs I met Mrs. Potts, and even in the face of such a tragedy I could not repress a smile at her appearance. She was capped by a large white affair and wore some ample garment that I believe would answer to the name of Mother Hubbard. Her eyes were wide with terror, and in the light of the candle that she held I could see her lips tremble as she framed her first question:

"What's happened to Mrs. Hill?"

"My aunt is dead. I am going for the doctor."

Her only answer was a slight clucking noise, meant, I suppose, to express regret. I passed her and went out of the front door.

It was that still, black time that precedes the first light of dawn; the rain had stopped, and even the wind, which had howled all night, was quiet. The only sound was the drip of the water from the eaves.

Suddenly there came another sound—some one was running. I heard the swish of the bushes and the impact of the feet on the rain-soaked earth. I strained my ears to hear, but soon all sound died away and there was again the oppressive silence. Suddenly, at my right, a light flashed through the trees and I knew that it came from the Doctor's house.

I ran down the steps and in a short space of time was on Doctor Bean's porch. The front door was open and the hall well lighted. At the foot of the stairs was an elderly man, who turned as I came up.

"Are you Doctor Bean?"

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

"My aunt, Mrs. Hill, has just died or been killed, I don't know which, but I want you to come at once."

"Hannah killed!" he exclaimed.

"I am not sure, but come. I'll tell you about it later."

"Yes, yes," he answered and accompanied me. "Shut the door quietly; there is no need to wake my daughter."

Neither of us spoke on the way over, but he occasionally uttered some exclamation of surprise and regret. He seemed a gentle, dignified man, and I couldn't imagine why Aunt Hannah found him so distasteful and yet was able to live in the same house with Mr. and Mrs. Potts.

The house was still in comparative darkness and my first order to Potts was to light as many lamps as he could find; there was no use making the occasion any gloomier than it was.

Aunt Hannah lay as I left her, the muscles of her face relaxed with the look of one who rested. The Doctor bent over her and made a careful examination.

"She received a blow on the forehead, but it wasn't sufficient to kill. She was in a weakened condition and some shock or excitement hurried the end. The blow may have been from the fall."

"Will you notify the coroner, Doctor?"

"Do you really think this is a case for the coroner. I see no real evidence of foul play."

"I have seen enough to arouse my suspicions, and I want the matter investigated!"

"Very well, I will notify Mr. Hardy at once."

I went down-stairs with him and saw him out of the house. It was the first hour of dawn and I had a feeling of deep thankfulness that the long, awful night was over.

HAD I ever had any experience in this line or had I been a reader of detective stories, I might have spent the time before the coroner's arrival profitably, but the whole thing was so new to me that all I could do was to walk about with my hands in my pockets while I waited impatiently for his coming. I remember that I expected small satisfaction from him, for as a rule the officials of villages are rather difficult to deal with and are likely to take their own opinion as final on every subject.

Then it occurred to me to telegraph for Henshaw. I had met him only once, but he had made a most agreeable impression on me, and I also knew of some very successful work that he had done for friends of mine, and by wiring Tom Hatch I could lay my hands on him. I had an ever-growing conviction that there was some deep mystery at the back of Aunt Hannah's death. I put

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on my hat and started down the walk, when some inner voice told me that I should not quit the house. A clue, a scrap of valuable evidence might be done away with. Indeed, when I went for the Doctor I left the coast clear for the destruction of any sign of guilt.

I was thinking this over when Potts appeared, looking like a gnome, with his bent body and pinched face. Probably gnomes look nothing like that, but it was the only word that seem to fit him as he stood there peering at me from under his bushy brows.

"Mr. Graham," he began, "you don't think somebody harmed Mrs. Hill, do you?"

"I am not sure, but we will find out. The coroner will be here soon, and he may be able to help us out."

"The coroner!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. By the way, Potts, had my aunt any enemies that you know of?"

"None that I know of, although she wasn't friendly with the Doctor's family; but they ain't the kind to do killing, I guess. It is terrible to have a death in the house, and it seems like something more than death with the old clock still."

For the first time I remembered the clock and its connection with the mystery, for surely it was a strange coincidence that it should stop at the very time that its mistress was dying. Then her last words—"The clock—Mary—" came back to me. What she wanted to say about the clock, I would never know. Mary was my mother, and Aunt Hannah probably tried to tell me of some act of restitution. I wanted to get rid of Potts so that I could make an unobserved examination of the clock, so I asked him if he would go to send a telegram for me. After some hesitation, which consisted of several looks to the back of the house, he consented. Hatch I knew could get hold of Henshaw for me, so I wrote out a message asking him to send the detective up at once.

I watched Potts out of sight, then turned to view the clock. It stood on the first landing of the stairway, as it had stood for fifty years or more, a tall, solemn affair made of some dark wood. In the front was a panel of glass through which one could see the pendulum swing back and forth. Now it was still and the door of the clock stood open. I looked in and about it, but could make nothing out of my observations, so I came away to await the clearer intelligence of Henshaw.

At six-thirty the coroner arrived, and I had a most agreeable surprise in him. He was a quiet, unassuming man, with a fund of natural sense and no narrow or stupid opinions. He was always ready to hear the other side and acted with fairness and consideration toward all.

He made an examination and then set the inquest for two o'clock.

"After all you have said, Mr. Graham, it doesn't look regular to me, and I shall be glad to render you whatever assistance possible."

"First of all, I want an officer put in charge of the house until you have investigated the matter."

"Oh, you have suspicions?"

"No—that is, not exactly, but I feel that the atmosphere of this house is none too friendly, and I want to take every precaution."

"Very well, I will leave Carnes." Turning to him, he said, "No one is to enter that room until I return."

With this responsibility off my shoulders I made my way to the telegraph-office and there learned that Potts had sent my wire. It would be several hours before an answer could come, so I went back to the house. There I found Mrs. Potts going about her work as if nothing unusual had occurred. As I came into the kitchen, she looked up and in a hard, metallic voice said:

"When are you going to bury her?"

The cold-bloodedness of the woman made me shudder, and I answered briefly that I had not decided. I wanted to ask her several questions, but knowing that the answers would be unsatisfactory, I thought the coroner in his official capacity might succeed better. About one o'clock this telegram came:

> Caught Henshaw in Boston. Will join you at once. HATCH.

Then I thanked Heaven for such a friend as Tom Hatch, and likewise for the coming of Henshaw.

CHAPTER IV

THE CORONER'S INQUEST

AT TWO o'clock the coroner arrived and the inquest was begun. News of this kind travels fast in so small a town, and there were many curious people hanging

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about the place, all anxious to know the details of Mrs. Hill's death. As I alone knew these details and had refused to divulge anything until the inquest, there were all sorts of wild rumors floating about. I have no doubt that with their natural suspicion of strangers they thought that I had something to do with it.

The first witness called by Mr. Hardy was Doctor Bean, who told of being summoned just after he had returned from a serious case some way out in the country. He had put up his horse and was about to retire when I arrived. He found Mrs. Hill dead; *rigor mortis* had not set in, so that her death had been quite recent. He made a thorough examination, and in his opinion she died from the effect of some shock or excitement which her system was too weak to withstand. There was a slight abrasion on the forehead, but not sufficient to cause death, and probably made when she fell in the hall.

"You have known Mrs. Hill a long time, have you not, Doctor?"

"Yes, we have been neighbors all of our lives."

"Have you any knowledge of any one who would wish her ill?"

"No, as far as I know she had no friends or enemies. For the past few years she has lived a very secluded life and she resented any intrusion."

Doctor Bean was excused and, as I was the first to reach Mrs. Hill, I was called next. I told my story in full—how I had been sent for, and her condition when I arrived. I laid stress on the fact that she was uneasy, in fact, in a state of fear, which subsided after I had been with her awhile to the extent that she could sleep. I told of the steps passing my door and of her scream which came immediately after. My listeners seemed intensely interested in my story, as doubtless Aunt Hannah had long been an object of curiosity and conjecture to them.

"You think that there was some one Mrs. Hill feared?"

"I have every reason to feel that she had a feeling of insecurity."

"Might it not have been the natural feeling of a woman in her state of health?"

"It did not seem so, as she was always afraid that some one was lurking around her door."

"She gave you no hint of what she feared?"

"No, she was so worn out from lack of sleep that we talked very little; she promised to go into details the next day."

"Was there any mention of a will?"

"No."

"Are you your aunt's heir?"

"I don't know."

"Are there any other near kin?"

"There was a brother, a sailor, but whether he is alive or dead I do not know."

"You say this was your first visit here since a child?"

"Yes."

"Were your relations with your aunt friendly?"

"Not unfriendly. I scarcely knew her."

"Will you repeat her last words?"

"She said, 'The clock, the clock—Mary——'"

"Whom did you understand by 'Mary'?"

"Mary was my mother."

"Have you any idea why she spoke of the clock?"

"No. I looked at it this morning and found something had happened to the works, but I could find nothing that connected it with her death."

THE next witness called was Potts, and a more abject object I have never seen; his poor thin face was paler than usual, and his lips twitched with excitement. He gave his name as Hiram Potts, and stated that he had been with Mrs. Hill nineteen years as gardener and general man about the place. For the past two years he had been so crippled by rheumatism that he had done little work, but Mrs. Hill kept him on for old times' sake.

"How long had Mrs. Hill been sick?"

"She's ailed for about a year, but she only took to her bed three weeks ago."

"Was a doctor called in?"

"No, sir, she didn't set much store by doctors; she always said nobody could cure her when her time came."

"When did she think of sending for Mr. Graham?"

"I don't know."

"Did you send the wire?"

"No, sir, I didn't know Mr. Graham was coming until his telegram came."

"Do you know whether Mrs. Hill had any enemies?"

For one fleeting second I felt Potts hesitate, then he answered, "No."

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I thought that, had he dared, he would have named the Doctor's family.

"Did you see anything that aroused your suspicions last night?"

"No, sir, my rheumatism won't let me sleep much, so I was sitting before the kitchen fire when I heard a scream. I must have been dozing, for it took me some time to tell where the sound came from. When I got up-stairs Mr. Graham was with his aunt, and she was dead."

"You have no more information to give?"

"No, sir."

He was allowed to retire.

Mrs. Potts was then called and came forward, looking even more unattractive and formidable than she had seemed last night. If she was nervous there was no trace of it, and she gave her testimony in a clear, decisive manner.

"Your name?"

"Amanda Potts."

"How long have you been with Mrs. Hill?"

"About seventeen years."

"Were you married to Mr. Potts when you came?"

"No."

"Then you met and married him while you were in Mrs. Hill's service?"

"Yes," she answered, and I could see that she was bursting to tell the coroner that it was none of his business, but there is something about the law and its officials that a certain class of people stand in awe of.

"Do you know any one that bore Mrs. Hill a grudge?"

"There was plenty she wasn't friendly with, but I don't know about the other."

Here she looked at me, and if there was ever a glance full of suspicion it was the one that Mrs. Potts now bent on me.

"Mrs. Potts, what ever became of Mrs. Hill's adopted son?"

"I don't know; he went away two years ago."

"Did she hear from him?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, the last I heard he was in South America."

"When was that?"

"A year ago."

The rest of her testimony told how she had been wakened by Potts who called out that something had happened to Mrs. Hill. Before this she had neither seen nor heard anything that aroused her suspicions; in fact, Mr. Graham was with his aunt most of the night, and she had felt free to go to bed. All told, nothing was revealed at the inquest that threw any light on the subject, and when the verdict was handed in, every one seemed to feel that the affair was closed. I, alone, was unsatisfied, for I distrusted the Potts family. I knew that my aunt feared some one, and above all I trusted my own spirit, which had been uneasy and suspicious ever since I entered the house, and no such feeling could be allayed by a verdict which read as this one did:

"Mrs. Hannah Hill came to her death from the effects of a shock caused by person or circumstance unknown."

CHAPTER V

A SHOT FROM THE DARK

THE more I thought it over, the more dissatisfied I became with the inquest and its verdict, for I was quite sure that the proper investigation would show that at the back of Aunt Hannah's death was a dark mystery, and that elements had long been at work which had robbed her of health and peace. I was unequal to managing any such investigation, and waited with impatience the coming of Henshaw.

I got the coroner's permission to leave the room and body untouched until he arrived. The train from Boston got in at six-thirty, and long before time I was down at the station waiting for him. The night came on early, and I tramped up and down the platform turning the matter over in my mind, but to no avail.

Henshaw was the only passenger to get off the train, and I went forward to meet him. His strong, steady handshake renewed my conviction that he was the man for the situation.

"Hatch wired me, and as I had just finished up a case in Boston, I came right on."

"That was lucky for me."

I told him my story as we walked to the house. He listened in silence, occasionally asking what seemed to me an irrelevant question.

"When you heard the running through the bushes, couldn't you get the direction?"

"Yes, it was toward the right."

"That is, toward the Doctor's house, and shortly afterwards the light went up?"

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"Yes."

"Have you made an examination of the yard?"

"No, I left everything for you."

"Which one of the Pottses sent you the wire?"

"Neither of them."

"Who did?"

I was on the point of telling him, when I remembered that I had made a promise to Miss Bean that I would not tell. I hesitated a moment, then said,

"They couldn't find out at the inquest. No one admitted having sent it."

Henshaw turned to me quickly, about to make some remark, but he contented himself with "So?"

By the time we reached the house, he finished his questions and declared himself ready to get to work.

I took him immediately to my aunt's room and there witnessed a curious performance, for if there was anything in that room that escaped the eyes of Henshaw it must have been beyond the seeing power of the human eye.

I asked several timid questions which met usually with silence, sometimes a queer unintelligible sound, one quite as satisfactory as the other.

"The night and insufficient light handicap me. I wish it were morning. Now for the clock."

I took him to the landing and held the oil lamp while he investigated the insides of the clock. I had contented myself with looking, but Henshaw ran his hand into the cavity back of the face.

"It is an old-fashioned fellow, and the support that held the works in place has been removed. When we find out who removed it we will know something about the death of your aunt, and when we know what the support was we will know more."

"What could it have been?" I asked.

"I don't know, but it was something of value, probably a box that fitted into the place of the old upright. Can you get me a candle?"

I set the lamp down and went away, and when I returned with the candle Henshaw was reading with apparent satisfaction and interest, a small piece of paper he was holding in his hands.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Something that dropped out of the box or bundle. What do you make out of it?"

HE TOOK the candle and continued his search while I read the slip of paper. It was written in a small, shaky hand, and was as follows:

Repair of chimney, $2.00 (still smokes).
Spading of garden, $2.50 (Potts is worthless).
Ralph, $25.00 (and no more).

I read it over several times, but to me it was an expense-sheet, and only that. I did smile at Aunt Hannah's remarks; they were the manifestation of a spirit that yields to the fraud of the world without being deceived by it.

"Well, there is nothing else here," said Henshaw, and, as we went down the stairs, "I like that aunt of yours; it is too bad that she had to go and leave so many stupid ones behind. Now I want to see old Potts."

"Want to see him alone?"

"Yes, I think I can get more out of him. I'd like to get some idea of the date of that expense-account."

"We must manage to get him away from his wife. I'll go out and engage her in a talk and send him in to you."

I found that pleasant couple in the kitchen, Mr. Potts huddled up by the fire, looking as miserable as it is possible for a human being to look; his head was bent and his hands were folded on his stick. Under the lamp sat Mrs. Potts sewing. Her mouth was firm and set and she seemed to sew determination in with each stitch. She looked up as I entered.

"Mr. Henshaw would like you to do a little errand for him, Mr. Potts."

"I can't go out of the house at night; it's bad for my rheumatism," he said in his querulous voice.

"It won't take you out of the house."

He rose reluctantly and left the room. I seated myself in the chair he had vacated. Alone with Mrs. Potts I had a distinctly uncomfortable feeling. I knew she would never break the silence, and I scarcely knew where to begin.

"Mrs. Potts, I never heard that my aunt had an adopted son. Will you tell me something about him?"

"There ain't much to tell; he went away two years ago," she answered.

"How long had he lived with her?"

"She took him when he was five, and he was twenty when he went away."

"What was he like?" I asked.

"Just a boy," was her illuminating answer.

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"Did he and my aunt quarrel?"

"I reckon so; she was too hard on him!" she flared out, and I knew that I had touched the soft spot in the heart of Mrs. Potts.

"You don't know where he is?"

"No, I told you before."

"What was his name?"

She sewed on without answering me.

"His name is Ralph, isn't it?" I insisted.

"If you knew, what did you ask me for?" she said sullenly.

"I just wanted to be sure."

"I don't know a thing about Mrs. Hill's death, and you can just tell that to anybody that comes prying around!"

And, having issued this ultimatum, Mrs. Potts rose and swept majestically from the room. I got up and started toward the door that led to the hall, when I heard a light tap at the window. It was such a faint sound that it was repeated before I was sure that it was not my imagination. I turned swiftly, blew out the light, threw up the shade and was about to raise the window, when Mrs. Potts's voice broke in.

"What are you doing?" There was something terrible in the quality of her voice, and I almost felt the cold steel in my back. I made no reply, but pushed up the window. This time Mrs. Potts shouted, "Get away, quick—Mr. Graham!"

The "Mr. Graham" was added, and I was quite sure that the first of the sentence was a warning to some one on the outside. I peered out into the darkness, but could see nothing. A few feet from the window there was a clump of bushes, and whoever had tapped was now hiding there.

As I looked out there was a sudden report, and the next second I felt a stinging sensation in my arm! By this time Mrs. Potts had made a light, and as I clutched my arm she came to me.

"I told you to keep away; there's all kinds of tramps around this time of year."

The door was thrown open and Henshaw entered, and shortly afterward Potts hobbled in.

"What is it?" Henshaw asked.

"Some one winged me from the outside."

"Quick, Potts, get a doctor!"

"Oh, sir, I can't go out at night."

"None of that! Get out of here, quick!"

It would take a braver man than Potts to disobey Henshaw when he used that tone, and Potts, after mumbling a few words, started toward the door, when Mrs. Potts broke in.

"Stay here. I'll fetch the doctor."

"You are not to leave the house, Mrs. Potts!" said Henshaw.

"Who says I can't?" she demanded.

"I do!"

"Who are you?" she asked defiantly.

"Well, that doesn't matter; you go out of here and I'll have you or some one you know under lock and key by to-morrow night!"

Her defiance left her and she stood perfectly still, looking at him.

"It will simplify matters if I run over myself," I said.

"You two think you are so smart, and you go right on sticking your head in the lion's den," said Mrs. Potts. Her courage had returned, and even if her figure was a little crooked she made her meaning plain.

"What do you mean?" Henshaw asked.

"If you are so smart, find out! But there ain't no use scaring the life out of Potts. He'd sooner meet the devil than that old Doctor."

I was about to leave the room as Mrs. Potts said this, and I turned back to see whether she were in sober earnest or whether it were a grim joke. From her face I gathered it was the former. I left them in Henshaw's hands and ran over to the Doctor's.

CHAPTER VI

MISS BEAN HAS SPRAINED HER ANKLE

I KNEW the wound in my arm was slight, but it was painful, and if I am to be quite truthful, I was not sorry to have an excuse for going over. I had never met a girl who made a more charming first impression than Miss Bean.

I rang the bell and the Doctor himself answered it. He was all ready to go out and I was lucky to catch him. I explained my coming and he led the way to the office.

"You narrowly missed getting a serious wound," he said, as he bandaged my arm. "Some one was a poor shot. May I ask how it happened?"

I told him as briefly as possible the circumstance of the shooting. He looked at me intently.

"Then the affair is more serious than I thought," he said.

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"I am afraid so, Doctor."

"My! who would think of dark mysterious things happening here in our quiet village! Of course, like the rest of the human family, we have our ups and downs, but somehow murders and dire tragedies we associate with great cities."

There was such an air of frankness and kindness about the old Doctor that I found myself wondering at Mrs. Potts's last statement. It could not be possible that a man with his benign eyes and humorous mouth could wrong any one!

When my arm was all bandaged I still wanted to linger. I remember that I kept listening for footsteps, but as none came I got up my courage and asked how Miss Bean was this evening.

"Daughter is laid up with a sprained ankle, I am sorry to say."

"Really! When did it happen?"

"Last night, when I got home from Mrs. Hill's, I found her in quite a bad way. She had grown uneasy about me, and coming down-stairs in the dark, she missed her footing. I have not told her of Mrs. Hill's death, as she is a nervous girl, easily upset."

I expressed my sympathy and asked whether I could do anything. He thanked me and said that it was not serious, but would keep her in for a while. When I got back to Henshaw, he was sitting before the fire in the living-room.

"Anything serious?" he asked as I came in.

"No, just a slight affair."

"I couldn't get a thing out of Mrs. Potts, but she knows a lot, and she is a bit afraid, as you saw by the way my threat took the wind out of her sails."

"What was it?"

"Nothing—just a bluff on my part; but, like a lot of bluffs, it worked for a while."

"Don't you think that tap on the window was for her?"

"Who else? I'd like to go out and look under that window, but it is so beastly dark I would accomplish nothing. I wish it were morning."

He began to walk up and down the floor. He was a small man with powerful shoulders and eyes that had a slightly blind look. That they could see everything, I knew, but the first impression was that he was near-sighted. The most noticeable thing about the man were his hands, which were white and thin and nervous, and as time went on I began to feel that he almost thought with his hands. Just now as he paced the floor he was touching the tips of his fingers with his thumbs, as if he were checking off the facts of the case. He was oblivious of my presence.

"Did you notice the Doctor's shoes?"

"Shoes? No, he was just getting ready to go out and I suppose he had on boots, but I didn't really notice."

"I wish I had gone. Did you see his daughter?"

"No, she is in bed with a sprained ankle."

"What?"—he turned on me like a flash.

"A sprained ankle," I repeated then; told him what the Doctor had said.

"A likely story! To miss your footing on a stairway that you have known all of your life and——"

"Oh, come, Henshaw!"

"What divides the two yards?"

"A wall made of the stones known as 'nigger-heads.'"

"You heard a running to the right, and there is a stone wall, and now she has a sprained ankle, for which her father gives a silly excuse! Graham, I wish it were morning!"

"You are all wrong, Henshaw; how could she be connected with this?"

"Don't get chivalrous," he said. "It is a sure way to block justice."

"I am not doing anything of the kind, but I can't see the point in suspecting everybody."

"You'd make a fine detective, Graham, with your motto of 'Suspect those we don't like; those we like, leave alone.' There are several things about this girl that need to be cleared up: first, if she was at outs with Mrs. Hill, why was she the one trusted to send the telegram to you?"

"How did you find out?" I asked, amazed.

"I made a guess. I knew you were shielding some one, and she was the most probable one. We know that much, and we are going to find out a lot more things about her, unless I am very much mistaken."

CHAPTER VII

MR. POTTS GIVES SOME INFORMATION

"YOU look dead beat, old man, you'd better turn in," Henshaw said to me, breaking the long silence that followed his last statement.

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"You need sleep yourself; you have a hard day before you," I answered, none too graciously, I fear, for I was annoyed with him. I had a distinct aversion to having Miss Bean drawn into the affair, and my old feeling toward detectives returned. It had always seemed to me that they did not care whom they implicated so long as they fastened the crime on some one. He ignored my tone and answered me in his old hearty way:

"I never sleep at this stage of the game. Besides, it will soon be light and I want to get to work."

"Well, call me if I can be of any service."

I made my way up-stairs and soon was in a deep sleep. The next I knew, Henshaw was standing over me.

"It is nine o'clock and there are some people here to see you," he said. "When they are gone I have things to tell you."

He left me and I dressed hurriedly and went down to make the final arrangement for the funeral which was to take place late that afternoon. A few of the town's people were still about, held more by curiosity than sympathy, I fancy. However, they had to be met, and so it was near noon before I was free to join Henshaw.

"By the way, no one guesses my trade, eh?"

"I have said nothing, only that you were a friend of mine, but I think Mrs. Potts suspects."

Henshaw laughed.

"You spend most of your time suspecting Mrs. Potts."

"Well, what is the news?"

"I was right; it was a woman running, and she did climb the wall between the two yards; she even left this bit of lace on one of the vines that cover it. The sprain must have come when she dropped on the other side. As a matter of fact, there is a rock just there and one foot struck it while the other sank into the wet earth, leaving a deep impression."

He told this in a calm matter-of-fact way that annoyed me more than a tone of triumph would have done.

I could find no answer for him. It did seem incredible that this girl could be concerned in so dark a deed, and yet when I looked back I could see that all along there had been some secret connection between the two women. Henshaw broke in on these thoughts.

"The telegraph operator remembered that Miss Bean sent you the wire, so I was right again. She was over here last night."

"I know, she came to tell me that her father was detained in the country."

"She was here later; I was able to trace her footprints from this house to her own door. There are a man's tracks, too, in her yard and this. She stood and talked to him near her own porch, then they separated. The tracks are very faint, as the rain fell after that, but her flight across Mrs. Hill's yard into her home was some time later and left a clear impression."

"And could you trace the other person?"

"When he left her he went to the rear and got over the wall somewhere in the garden. From there on I could find no trace of him."

"Were there any marks under the kitchen window?"

"Yes," said Henshaw slowly, "there were prints of Mr. Potts's shoes there."

"Potts! Are you sure?"

"Dead sure."

"But he was with you at the time!"

"With me?"

"Yes, I sent him in to you, as you asked me to."

"Well, he didn't show up. I was waiting for him when I heard the shot."

"I remember, now, he came into the kitchen a few minutes after you."

"That is right, he did."

"I always have suspected those people."

Henshaw smiled. "I know you have, and of course they are holding back information, but just how they are tied up in the matter isn't clear yet."

"He is a sly old fox and you will have to work to catch him."

"Very likely. And now I have to see Miss Bean. Suppose that doesn't please you?"

"It is all right, only I hope you will tell her how you found out about the telegram."

"I will," he said with a smile. "See you later."

He went out and I didn't see him again until evening.

IN THE meantime Aunt Hannah was buried in the old family lot, only a small number following her to her resting-place. I stood by the grave with many strange thoughts swimming in my brain. The village preacher said a few words and we returned to our homes, I to

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wait with what patience I could for Henshaw.

Mrs. Potts had gone to the grave, but, owing to his rheumatism, Mr. Potts had remained at home. I found him in his accustomed place before the kitchen fire. His wife had stopped at one of the stores on the way home.

"It is all over, Mr. Graham," he said sadly.

"Potts," I said impulsively, "why don't you make a clean breast of it?"

"Of what?" he asked innocently.

"I mean of what you know about this affair. You don't think my aunt died a natural death, do you?"

"I did think so until you were shot; now it is hard to tell what to think. It is a hard world!" he whined, and nodded his head back and forth.

I looked at him, trying to make out whether he was an arch-hypocrite or the simple old man he pretended to be. Just then I heard the front door open and went out to meet Henshaw.

"Well, what luck?"

"None; the girl is laid up—in a bad way I guess, at least, if you can believe her father. Says she has been delirious all day."

"Delirious?"

"Yes, fever came on in the night and this morning she is in a serious condition. The old man doesn't understand it, but I think some shock has brought it on."

"What do you think of the Doctor?"

"Oh, he seems square enough, but guilt has a way of fastening itself on the unexpected man, and there was old trouble between him and Mrs. Hill. I'd like to know what about, but the Doctor wouldn't commit himself. He said that he never bore her any ill will. The thing I want to know now is who was wearing Potts's shoes last night!"

Here Henshaw raised his voice and cast his eye at the door so that I knew he was speaking for the benefit of some one on the other side. "Of course, Potts may be innocent, but there are prints of his shoes under the kitchen window, and they were made last night about the time of the shooting. Oh, good evening, Mr. Potts," he said, as the old fellow opened the door. I glanced swiftly at Henshaw and saw an amused smile on his face.

"There is something I want to tell you," began Potts. "I don't know if it has anything to do with the case, but a pair of my shoes has been stolen."

"So?" said Henshaw.

"Yes, sir. I usually keep my good pair under the bed. They were there yesterday morning—I remember seeing them—but my rheumatism's been so bad I ain't been near the bed since, so I can't tell when they were taken."

"Have you asked Mrs. Potts?"

"She says she hasn't seen them."

"Very well, Mr. Potts, you may be sure we will trace your shoes. By the way, what was the cause of the trouble between Mrs. Hill and Doctor Bean?"

"It was because the Doctor wouldn't let his daughter go with Ralph."

"Indeed! When was that?"

"About four years ago. The children grew up together and when they got older it looked like a match, when all of a sudden the Doctor wouldn't let Ralph come around."

"Did the young people see each other?"

"I don't know."

"What was the Doctor's objection?"

"I don't know, but I always guessed it was because Ralph was an adopted son."

"What was Miss Bean's attitude?"

"I don't know. She is a queer girl, but I guess she was fond of him."

Henshaw was discreet enough not to look at me, and in truth I was not very well pleased with the turn affairs had taken. However, I listened with deepening interest to Potts.

"Why did this Ralph leave home?"

"After he grew up he was pretty wild, and he and Mrs. Hill didn't get on so well. He ran away from her, and when he wanted to come back she wouldn't take him."

"She heard from him?"

"I think he sometimes wrote her begging letters."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No, sir."

"That will do, Mr. Potts."

The old man shuffled out and closed the door after him. Henshaw turned to me.

"He was listening at the door, that is why I raised my voice. I wanted to draw him from cover."

"What do you think now?"

"That it is a bad sign when a man naturally secretive tries to tell something."

"Meaning?"

"Many things, and I am beginning to see

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light. Tell me again your aunt's last words."

I knew Henshaw never forgot, and wondered what the new idea was, but I repeated, "'The clock—the clock—Mary——'"

"And by 'Mary' she meant your mother?"

"I thought so, yes."

"Do you know the name of Doctor Bean's daughter?"

"No," I answered.

"Well, it is Mary, too!" he said slowly.

CHAPTER VIII

A PAIR OF MUDDY BOOTS

LEAVING me to make what I could out of this bit of information, Henshaw left me and was gone for hours. The long strain and unusual excitement were telling on me, and the wound in my arm, while not serious, was painful and wore out my patience. I sat before the grate fire in the living-room and soon found myself nodding.

I stumbled over to the queer old couch, and the next thing that I was conscious of was the sun streaming in the window full on my face. Henshaw was standing before the fire. He was touching the tips of his fingers together, and by this time I had learned that it was useless to question him when that operation was in process. He turned and, seeing me awake, came over and sat down by me.

"That girl has the key to the situation, and I've got to see her!"

"But if she is ill?"

"I'm not so sure. Why did her father tell me that there was no real trouble between him and Mrs. Hill, when there was all the row about Ralph? The most curious thing about the whole affair is the way everybody seems to hate the other one, yet they all go on playing right into each other's hands. I have a theory, but there is no use telling you until I have something to substantiate it."

"Oh, go on; the theory of an intelligent man is always interesting, if no more."

"We all like it, but never mind. The only thing I will say is that somebody is after something that they haven't been able to get hold of. If the trip into your aunt's house on the night of her death had been successful you would never have been shot. That is one reason that I didn't go out and look about; I stood no chance to catch him, as he was on his guard and I thought it better to trap him when he returned."

"Do you think he will?"

"Yes, I feel quite sure that he will. Now I want to get the date of that expense-sheet that we found. It must have been some time in the early Spring, as I believe it is then that gardens are spaded, and when we find out when the chimney was mended we shall know whether it was this year or last."

"But why all of this?"

"Want to know when Mrs. Hill was last in touch with Ralph."

"But she may have been after that time."

"She said 'no more,' and for the present we will suppose that she was a woman of her word. Will you go now and tell Potts that the chimney is not drawing well and that you want to get hold of the man who repairs it?"

I went to do his bidding and learned from Potts that Jeb Hibberd was the one who did the job.

"But he ain't no good," said Potts, "only last Spring he fixed it, and it ain't never done any better."

"By the way, Mr. Potts, who was my aunt's lawyer or business man?"

It was strange that up to this time no one had come forward with the information, and she had made it so plain that there were business matters to attend to, which she wanted to go over with me.

"She didn't have a regular lawyer; she collected her own rents and managed her affairs herself."

"Where did she do her banking?"

"I don't know, she never talked her business."

I HATED to ask the old fellow these questions, but so far we had not found a scrap of paper that gave any clue to her money or estate. After this unsatisfactory conversation with Potts I returned to Henshaw and repeated all that passed between us.

"That is all right; now we know that one of the family is lying. She says that Mrs. Hill never heard from Ralph; he says she did, and we have that scrap of paper to back him up; she heard from him last Spring. Mrs. Potts now becomes the center of interest, not forgetting, of course, Miss Bean."

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"It is queer how they dislike each other."

"Does Miss Bean share Mrs. Potts's feeling?"

"Yes, she told me they were untrustworthy, and that he was the better of the two."

"Seems to me she told you a lot for a new acquaintance, but that is good. You never mentioned it before."

He thought this over for a while, then turned to me with, "Now, I want you to tell me as much of your family history as you know."

"That will be very little, I am afraid. My mother was never inclined to talk about her family, and I had an idea that they had not been very good to her. I am quite sure she never harmed any one in her life. There were three children, Hannah, Moses and Mary. Moses went to sea when he was quite young. I imagine that he ran away from home; my grandfather was very strict, and the children feared him.

"Aunt Hannah married a Mr. Hill, who died the year before we came to visit her. I can remember now how she frightened me in her heavy mourning. My mother married my father when she was eighteen. She was ten years younger than my aunt and was, I fancy, very much under her dominion until she asserted herself the night we left the house."

"Was your father alive then?"

"No, he died a year after my birth."

"Where was your home then—New York?"

"No, we lived in the suburbs of Boston; it was after my mother's death that I went to New York."

"If there was no communication between you and your aunt how did she know of your change of home?"

"She advertised for me." As he seemed amazed, I explained further.

"Yes, in the Boston and New York papers. I saw the notice in the *Herald* asking me to send my address."

"This was——"

"Ten years ago."

"What came of it?"

"Nothing but the cards on my birthday."

"Queer, a queer woman, surely," said Henshaw thoughtfully. "She probably just wanted to keep in touch with you. How about the brother—have you never heard what became of him?"

"I don't know whether he is alive or dead; my mother never heard from him."

"His name was Moses Banks?"

"Yes."

"Now, let's see how many people there are that we can suspect of causing Mrs. Hill's death. As a rule, I never talk about a case until it has about shaped itself for the finish, but I am afraid that you will die of boredom unless you get something new to think about—you have gone around for the last two days with your hands in your pockets and the look of a lost soul on your face."

"I didn't know that you had time to notice me—the thing is so strange; I feel that I am in a dark room and can't find the door that leads out into the light. Do tell me all about it."

"I can't do that yet, but here are a few speculations that may interest you. First there is old Potts. Mrs. Hill mistrusted him; why, we don't know, only we instinctively do the same, ourselves. We know that he was prying around all the time and may have known where she kept her money. We also know that he is fond of money—watch him take a tip. His footprints were under the window after you were shot; there is only one thing in his favor about that, owing to his affliction he carries most of his weight on his right foot, only the toe of the left touches the floor. Now, with the tracks, the prints of the right and left were even or alike in depth of impression."

"Potts may not be so bad off as he pretends. I'd like to see him walk when he is alone."

"Good! You are improving, Graham. I was about to remark that myself and, of course, we must find out how real this rheumatism is. Next is his wife; she didn't like Mrs. Hill."

"No, I think she likes no one."

"You are wrong; she is a woman of strong likes, and one of the people she cares for is that old shell of a husband. Didn't you see how she jumped in and offered to go for the Doctor when he was afraid? She is a woman of strong feeling, whether it is like or dislike."

"You are right; I remember how she flared up when I suggested that Ralph wasn't all he might be."

"Yes, and now we come to him as a suspicious character. Of course he may be miles away, and if that is true, he is out of

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the running. But Mrs. Hill had quarreled with him and he needed money—so far that is all that we know against him."

"The Pottses have tried to throw suspicion on Doctor Bean," I said.

"Yes, but his known character and attitude toward the affair are against any such thought. It is queer, his insisting that there was no trouble between him and Mrs. Hill, when his own daughter, even, told you that they were not friends. As for her—that is, Miss Bean—until I know more, I shall say nothing. There is Mrs. Hill's brother—we don't know whether he is alive or dead; in fact, there is very little that we are sure about—the very seeming simplicity of it makes the difficulty of the case."

"You are right. I thought it would all be out by this time."

"If I were to say to whom all the evidence points as the guilty man you would be amazed."

"Really? To whom?"

"The strongest evidence I have is against one John Graham!"

"I?" I gasped out.

"Yes, there is a fine case against you, and if I had been sent for by Mrs. Potts, by this time I would have tied you up in a knot that you would have had a hard time undoing. Every bit of the circumstantial evidence is against you, which shows the value of circumstantial evidence, sometimes."

"But you have no reason to suppose that I shot myself, have you?"

"No," and Henshaw laughed heartily, a strange sound in this gloomy house, "though men have gone that far to cover up a deed. But don't look so serious; I am only talking. I just wanted to show you how careful a detective has to be, and even if there is evidence against your friends, the Pottses, we must know something definite before we take any steps."

"Do you know, Henshaw, I keep feeling that if we could just push around one corner the thing would clear up."

"Well, I am going out now to clear up several matters. Let us hope that they will take us around the corner."

He was off and it was after dark before I saw him again.

I wanted to inquire after Miss Bean, but with Henshaw waiting for information it made rather a delicate situation. When she knew she might think that I worked in with him.

I had a sudden faint feeling which reminded me that I had had nothing to eat all day, and to remedy that I started to the kitchen. I was wearing house slippers and my approach must have been noiseless, for I opened the door and stood for a moment looking at old Potts before he was aware of my presence. He was sitting by the fire, busily engaged in cleaning a pair of very muddy boots!

CHAPTER IX

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS

"WELL, Mr. Potts," I said, as I picked up the uncleaned shoe, "the lost has been found!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Why your shoes that were stolen have come back."

"That was another pair," he mumbled.

"Well, as your rheumatism has kept you in for days, where did you get all of that mud?"

"I wore them out this morning. I felt a little better and went out for a spell."

"I was out, too, but I didn't find all of that mud," I said relentlessly.

"I was out towards the barn; it's always muddy out there."

"All right, but I'll keep this shoe to show Mr. Henshaw."

"Oh, Mr. Graham, you are hard on me! That ain't fair. I ain't done no harm. I always served Mrs. Hill faithful, even when the others were against her."

"Who were the others?" thinking that his fear might make him talk freely.

"Everybody but me was down on her because she wouldn't put up with Ralph. I stood by her because I knew she was right; he was a bad lot from the beginning—I always told Mrs. Potts, but she wouldn't believe me."

"Don't whine any more, Potts. If you are innocent, no one can harm you; only you would simplify things and spare yourself a lot of trouble if you would speak right out."

"I ain't hiding nothing, Mr. Graham; I swear I ain't. How could I know anything about Mrs. Hill's death?"

"Why were you always listening and spying around in my aunt's lifetime?"

"I was looking after her because I was afraid that she was going to die by herself

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sometime. Toward the last Mrs. Hill got so she suspicioned everybody, even me, her best friend."

"I don't like to doubt you, Mr. Potts, but just now it doesn't look that way." With this I left him, taking the muddy shoe with me.

I felt quite like a detective and could scarcely wait for Henshaw's return to show him my find. But as time went on and he didn't come, the shoe got to be an awful burden. I couldn't go out and leave it and I knew no safe place to hide it, and it began to look as if I were to sit all day holding the muddy shoe.

At last it grew intolerable; there was nothing to read in the house, nothing to smoke, and I was tired of thinking. I carefully wrapped the shoe up and with it under my arm started out towards the post-office. As I passed the Doctor's house I looked at it with interest. It was a pleasant-looking place with a well-kept yard.

I wondered how the sick girl was. I had just about reached her gate when a large woman came out of the house and made a sign for me to wait, and, as she came up, handed me a note. Without a word she turned and went into the house. For a moment I was too surprised to move, then I recovered and walked on a few steps before opening the note. When I did I read the following words written in a shaky hand:

Can't get out. To-night will you be under my window at nine o'clock? The northeast room.

There was no signature, but it was from Miss Bean without doubt. I could scarcely restrain myself from crying out at this new excitement; then came the question whether I should tell Henshaw or work the thing out by myself. Discretion said the former, inclination the latter; besides I was afraid that he might frighten her, kill any impulse that she had to speak. At that time I did not know that Henshaw adapted his method to the person that he was dealing with, and so I decided to keep it to myself until I had something definite to tell him. As I had hours of time to kill I walked on to the business section of the town and made my purchases.

It was a sleepy little place, this home of my forefathers: a few stores, many comfortable old homes and a prosperous outlying district. I saw curious glances thrown at me, and occasionally some friendly soul passed the time of day, but I was too intent on my coming interview to give thought to the things about me. In fact, I was so preoccupied that I was scarcely conscious of the rain that began to beat down on me, and by the time I got back I was drenched through and had to change my clothes before I joined Henshaw, who was waiting in the living-room for me.

My feeling of triumph over the finding of the muddy shoe in the hands of Mr. Potts had long since vanished, and in a calm fashion I turned it over to him.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "this is fine! Here is enough to convict him of shooting you at any rate, and a lot more will come of it."

"He is frightened and you may get something from him. With me he would do nothing but protest that he was Aunt Hannah's friend."

"I wish I had been behind you when you opened the door on him; I think I would have learned something."

"The people in the street would have thought me crazy if they had known that the bundle I was carrying so carefully was an old shoe belonging to Hiram Potts."

"Exactly," he answered. "Well, has anything else happened?"

"No," I said, trying to keep my tone even, "what could?"

He looked at me sharply. Henshaw has a way of making one feel most uncomfortable.

"Many things are apt to happen just now. I had a talk with the Doctor."

His sudden change of the subject made me more uncomfortable than ever. He had behaved this way when I refused to tell him who sent me the telegram, but I picked him up and trusted to luck to keep my secret.

"To what end?" I asked.

"Still contends that he had no ill feeling for Mrs. Hill; and as for the Ralph matter, he and she talked it over and she agreed with him that it was not for the best that the two young people become engaged. Apart from Ralph's character, which was rather weak, there was some uncertainty about his parentage and the Doctor objected. It is strange how the broad mind narrows when the case is brought home."

"Well, naturally," I said.

"Yes, naturally, in this case," said Henshaw with an amused smile.

"Oh, come, you know you have to have some kind of order in these things if the integrity of the family is to be preserved."

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"Yes," he answered, but I saw by his face that he was not paying any attention to me. His mind was already off on another line of thought. "This parentage of Ralph's is a thing that I want to know about. The Doctor could tell me nothing; in fact, it was Mrs. Hill's honesty that made her tell him, and she went into no details. He thinks the secret was buried with her."

"What do you think?"

"My experience has taught me that there are very few secrets that are really buried."

"You look worn out, Henshaw, I wish you would try to get some sleep to-night, and let the case rest."

"Will you look after things if I do?" he asked, looking at me strangely, or at least my guilty conscience interpreted his look so.

"Are there things that need looking after to-night?" I asked, in as matter-of-fact a tone as I could command.

"I don't know—are there?"

"You are tired, Henshaw, and it makes you full of nonsense."

"I am tired. There is something about this air that makes a man tired and hungry, and, after I have had a bit to eat, I will turn in. To-morrow I hope for developments, but now for food. Will you speak to Mrs. Potts, or shall I? Oh, here she is! Good evening, Mrs. Potts; I was just saying how hungry I am," he said suavely.

She announced that supper was ready, and we followed her to the dining-room. After dinner we adjourned to the living-room for a good-night cigar. Comfortably settled in an old-fashioned armchair before a blazing fire, Henshaw showed no inclination to go to bed; in fact, as time went on his sleepiness seemed to fall from him, and I had a vision of his suddenly becoming as active and fit as when he arrived. He was a man of such tremendous vitality, that fifteen minutes served the same purpose that seven hours' sleep does for most of us; at least, I thought that as I sat opposite, watching him getting wider awake with each puff of his cigar.

He was rather inclined to talk, and for the first time he found me an unsympathetic listener. Under this treatment, he began to yawn and show symptoms of returning drowsiness, but still he stayed on, and as the clock struck eight I began to devise in my mind ways and means of getting him off to bed.

At last he rose, stretched himself, and announced that he was about to turn in. I said no detaining word, and soon I heard him ascending the stairs.

CHAPTER X

THE RENDEZVOUS AND THE ATTACK

I WAITED as patiently as I could for nine o'clock to come. When it was ten minutes of the hour I put on my greatcoat and quietly left the house. It was a moonless night and cold, but there was a bracing quality in the air and I felt in fine fettle for an adventure, should such a thing occur. I little dreamed what would happen—probably would have been more cautious had I suspected that all was not safe.

I stood on the porch for a moment and debated whether it were wiser to go boldly into the Doctor's yard or make my way stealthily to the rendezvous. I decided on the latter, for fear Henshaw might hear me go down the gravel walk and follow me, and I particularly wished to conduct this part of the investigation alone.

As I stole out into the yard from the shelter of the trees I looked up and saw the light burning in his room. Evidently he suspected nothing, and so far I was safe. By this time I had grown fairly well acquainted with the yard and I expected to have no trouble finding the way to the wall. But things have a way of looking so different at night that I must have gone round and round before I finally struck the stone wall that divides the two yards. I tried to move quietly, but it seemed to me that I was making enough noise to arouse the whole neighborhood; the dry branches snapped as I struck them, and the leaves and twigs on the ground made a crackling sound with each step.

As I mounted the wall, I saw a tiny candle burning in one of the up-stairs windows; it was the northeast room! At that moment the town clock struck nine. I jumped down and stood directly beneath the window.

The candle went out, the window was raised, and a voice asked softly, "Are you there?"

It was Mary Bean's voice.

"Yes," I answered.

"I can't get out. This was the only way I could reach you. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, distinctly. I'm sorry you have

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been ill," I whispered. "Are you better?"

"Thank you, yes. I have something Mrs. Hill wanted me to give you if anything happened to her."

"That is good news, we are so in the dark."

"I'll tell you about it later—there." A bundle fell at my feet. "Hurry away!" said the voice.

I picked up the package and started back toward the wall in high spirits. This mood lasted only a short time, for I had not gone five steps when a blow from behind felled me, and my consciousness lasted just long enough to feel some one snatch the bundle and rush away. How long I lay there I don't know, even now, but when I did recover a bit there was a terrible throbbing in my head and a great weakness in my legs, and for a while I was unable to rise.

At last I managed to get to my feet and with many halts got over the wall and to my own house. The door was locked and I had to do much knocking before there was any sign of life, it seemed to me that time had stopped and I had been standing there forever. Then I heard some one coming and Henshaw threw open the door.

"Graham!" he cried, and as I fell in the doorway he caught me.

"I knew you were up to something, but I heard you in your room," he said, as he helped me into the living-room and got me some brandy. In a few words I told him my story and his only comment was, "You have muddled things, Graham."

"I know," I answered, and in truth I was very much ashamed that my stupidity had brought things to this pass, for it was clear to me without a word from Henshaw that what he predicted had happened. The object that had kept the guilty man hanging around the place was now in his possession, and our tactics would have to change from trap-setting to active pursuit.

"You'll be all right soon," said Henshaw, and he was gone.

What his new plan was I couldn't guess, but his hurried exit showed that some line of action had suggested itself to him and he was quick to act on it. The pain in my head subsided somewhat, and I cursed myself for my fatal gift for doing the wrong thing, and racked my brain to find some way to repair the damage I had done. I tried to reconstruct the whole proceeding but one thing had followed the other so quickly that I found it difficult to get my bearings.

THROUGH it all I heard the voice of Mary Bean. It was one of those rare voices that contain an unconscious caress. I hoped that she did not know the failure of her plans. Who could have known that I was there? Could any one have come on me without my hearing his approach? I asked myself these two questions, and the first answer that came was "no." But some one did know that I was there. Who?

Suddenly it flashed over me that the note I received that afternoon I had left in the pocket of my coat when I changed suits. Then it came to me that Henshaw had heard some one moving around in my room. Who? Was it Mr. or Mrs. Potts? Who was the villain that was playing hide-and-seek with us? With the wound in my arm, the bump on my head and the infernal mystery of the thing, my nerves were getting in a bad way. Taking the note with me, now that it was all over, I went down-stairs and into the kitchen. My impulse was to accuse the Pottses boldly, but I decided to leave the initiative to Henshaw in the future. I found Mrs. Potts sitting by the fire, sewing as usual. Mr. Potts was nowhere to be seen, and I asked for him.

"He's in bed. Little sleep he has had since the house got all turned up." She looked up at me. "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing much—why?"

"You look pale and sick," she replied, and there was a look almost of solicitude on her face.

"I am not feeling any too well."

"You don't eat nothing; I'll get you a bite."

Her tone was almost kindly, and I rubbed my eyes and looked again to see if it was really Mrs. Potts talking. She had put down her sewing and was giving me her attention for the first time.

"I don't care for anything to eat."

"Well, you will never get anywhere on a empty stomach," she said gruffly. I smiled—a sickly smile, I fear, for the pain in my head had returned and the bed was the most attractive place in the world just then.

"I am going to turn in, Mrs. Potts; don't lock the front door; Mr. Henshaw may be late getting in."

"He always gets in late," she answered.

I passed one of the most restless nights of my life, sometimes dropping off to sleep

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from sheer exhaustion, starting up each time expecting to hear the old clock on the stairs strike—one—two, and the scream that followed. It was on one of these occasions that I heard Henshaw open the front door. I threw on a bath-robe and went out to meet him.

He came wearily up the stairs.

"Worn out, old man?"

"Just about."

"Any news?"

"Yes, lots, but I've got to sleep a bit before I tell it. It is the kind that will keep and I need rest for the day ahead."

"Sure, turn in," I said. "Didn't get the package back, did you?"

"No, haven't got my hands on it yet. What do you make out of this?"

He held up some object which the light of the early morning showed to be something like a doctor's case.

I looked at it a moment, then cried, "Why, Henshaw, I know that; I have seen it before."

"Where?"

"The night I got here—the man who rode up with me had it in his hands."

"And you never told me?"

"How was I to know that he had any bearing on the matter?"

I told him of the drive from the station.

CHAPTER XI

HENSHAW MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES

THERE was no more sleep in me, so I took up a book and tried to fill in the time before eight o'clock. I found it hard to give my attention to any reading matter when there was so much of interest and excitement going on around about me. Promptly at eight I waked Henshaw, and after a cold plunge he was "as good as new," he said. Down-stairs we went, where Mrs. Potts had an excellent breakfast waiting for us.

"Well, I suppose you are impatient to hear all about it," Henshaw said, as Mrs. Potts left us to ourselves.

"I am anxious to know, so out with it. Say, you know this is all right for you—it is your trade, but my affairs in town are at a standstill while I hang around here. I had word yesterday that would have taken me home under ordinary conditions."

"Well, conditions aren't ordinary, and I fancy there is more to happen. We are dealing with a determined spirit! As for you, I like your company, but I would have progressed faster with you away."

"I did muddle things, but from now on I won't make a move without your permission."

"Oh, it is not so bad as you think. You, at least, did bring things to a point. Now we know better how to go forward. If that girl hadn't written to you——"

"But I should have let you in on it."

"Yes, it would have been better, but that is all over now and at least we know of Miss Bean's connection with the matter. Her father did have a break with Mrs. Hill, or rather she broke with him because he wouldn't countenance an engagement between Ralph and his daughter. The old Doctor had no feeling except to protect his child, in fact, he was always fond of Mrs. Hill, and I imagine in his youth had been a beau of hers."

"Where did you get all of this information?" I asked.

"Last night after I left you I went over to the Doctor's house. He was not at home and I had no trouble seeing her when she heard that harm had come to you. She told me all I am telling you, and with all of this I have been able to clear up several dark places."

"Tell me how she and my aunt were so friendly."

"Well, it seems that Mrs. Hill's one desire was to appear consistent, at least that was what the girl thought, but I believe that there was a deeper reason for your aunt's attitude. It may have been to protect Miss Bean; anyway after she broke with the Doctor she pretended that she disliked the daughter, too. The girl did not say, but I think the old lady's liking grew after she found out what Ralph really was—she is a loyal soul, and whatever she thinks of Ralph, she says nothing."

"Maybe there is nothing to say. We have somehow just taken it for granted that he is no good."

"We have some proof," said Henshaw, "but that has nothing to do with the present story. Miss Bean often came by stealth to see Mrs. Hill, even the Pottses never knew of her coming and going."

"The affair with Ralph—was that continued clandestinely?" I asked, harking back to the center of interest.

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"No, she soon came to see the wisdom of her father's decision and gave up all thought of him. Even Mrs. Hill, as I said before, agreed, but would not admit it. I don't think it was a serious affair—just one of those romantic attachments that a young girl is likely to indulge in."

"Poor old lady! what a queer, distorted life she led, and how it foreshadowed her end!"

"Yes, there were no friends, no one she trusted but Miss Bean. As far as the girl knows there were no enemies, but either she feared some one or she grew very eccentric toward the last, for she was constantly expecting something dreadful to happen to her. She confided to her the hiding-place of her valuable papers and money."

"It was——"

"In the old clock on the stairs. That has been plain from the first. There was an agreement that if anything happened to Mrs. Hill, Miss Bean was to notify you and tell you of the hiding-place. It is evident that your aunt had the best of intentions toward you. There was a system of signals arranged. If danger threatened the treasure, Mrs. Hill was to put a lighted candle in the window and the girl was to come over, get it and take it to a place of safety. If you will notice, there is a cleared stretch between the two houses at only this one place. Miss Bean had a key to the house and one to the clock."

"Aunt Hannah did trust her."

"Who wouldn't, after knowing her? She has the clearest eyes I ever looked into." It was my time to smile. "Well, on the night in question," he went on, "she was unable to sleep. She said that she was excited and nervous about Mrs. Hill after you had told her of the old lady's sudden sinking spell. She saw the light burning very late over here. Right here is the only part of her whole story that isn't quite distinct. I mean why she sat up all night, knowing that you were with your aunt and able to protect her."

"Maybe she thought that I was the one Aunt Hannah feared."

"Scarcely, though at first that may have been in her head; anyway, the candle was suddenly put in the window, and, late as it was, she did her part. She got out of her house quietly, crossed the two yards and let herself into this house, tiptoed up-stairs to the clock and took out the package. There was perfect silence in the house until she got back to the front door, then she heard a door open overhead. Outside she waited a few minutes to see what would happen and when you opened the front door you heard her running."

"HOW well she did her part."

"Yes, but Mrs. Hill had had her rehearse it so that she could do it quickly if the occasion ever arose."

"Well, it arose with a vengeance, didn't it?"

"Yes, and as I said, she sprained her ankle when she climbed over the wall. In her excitement she got over at the wrong place. She knew nothing of the happenings over here until the next day, when the coroner and the others arrived for the inquest. Only then did she realize how it would look if it were known that she had been in the house and now had the papers in her possession. The excitement and the sprain brought on a high fever, and that is why you did not hear from her sooner. She arranged it as she did in order that her father might know nothing of her connection with the affair. Now I have told you the whole story, and in closing I would like to say, Graham, that you have excellent taste in other things than cigars."

With the air of a connoisseur he lighted the one I had just handed him.

"What about the medicine-case?"

"That isn't a medicine-case, but one of those leather boxes that electrical massage instruments come in—'vibrators' they are called."

"Have you found the owner?"

"No. If I had, I probably wouldn't be sitting here theorizing my head off to you. You know there is nothing that will make a man so theoretical as defeat."

"You aren't defeated yet, are you?"

"Not on your life! I only said 'defeat' to round out the sentence. Now I want to know all about you last night. When I left you down-stairs I thought that you had something on your mind, but of course I didn't dream that it was anything so important—which only goes to show that when a detective ceases to be suspicious he is lost. After I got to my room I started toward your room to speak to you; then I decided to let the whole thing rest until morning. As I got near your door I distinctly heard some one moving around in

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the room and it was done so boldly that I thought, of course, it was you."

"I didn't go up-stairs at all, but took my coat from the hall and went out."

"How soon was this after I left you?"

"Almost immediately, I thought you suspected something and I got away as quickly and silently as possible."

"Then some one was in your room."

"I know, that is why I was knocked out—another bit of stupidity on my part."

"How so?" he asked, looking at me with great interest.

"Why, after the rain when I changed my coat, I left the note in the pocket of the wet one. Some one was spying about in my room and found it, beat me to the rendezvous and laid me out when I started home."

"You think some one was waiting there for you?"

"Yes, I am sure of it. Had any one come up on me I would have heard him, for I found it impossible to walk without making any noise."

"And you have no idea who your assailant was?"

"No, it was so dark and he worked so quickly from behind that there was no way for me to know anything. Do you know who it was?"

"I have an idea given me by the footprints, though they are none too distinct. They are not the prints that I saw under the window the night you were shot, nor are they the ones I found after your aunt's death. In fact, they were the prints made by a large-footed woman and I believe, Graham, that this time we have a perfect right to suspect your friend Mrs. Potts!"

"Mrs. Potts! Why, I thought that she was beginning to like me; she was almost pleasant to me when I went out to the kitchen after you left me."

"Well, one is likely to be pleasant to a man one has all but killed; it is the least one can do. But tell me about her, what she said, and how she looked," he said eagerly.

I TOLD him of my conversation with her the night before.

"With the right education she would have made a master criminal," he said, "and I wouldn't mind knowing her record as it stands. But that was a mistake—the sudden friendliness with you, for when a sulky woman thaws and a secretive man talks, watch out!"

"So you think she found the note and was there waiting for me?"

"Probably. Now what was it she was so keen about getting hold of? Surely not money, for there was scarcely enough there to make her run such a risk. You know it must be something really worth while to have several people put themselves, and incidentally you and me, to so much trouble for. By the way, Miss Bean gave me the name of your aunt's bank, and as soon as possible you ought to get into communication with them. She sent all of her money there, and no doubt there is quite a sum waiting for the heirs." He handed me a slip of paper with the name of a bank in a near-by town on it. "There is no will that we can find and you seem to be the only kin to turn up."

"I am the only one living that I know of, but there must be a will."

"Of course there is, somewhere."

"That may be the paper Mrs. Potts wants."

"Very likely, but she can't want it for herself alone; for with no will Mrs. Potts gets nothing, and with the will there may be a legacy for her and the old fellow. No, she either wanted something else or she is working for some one."

"Well, what are you up to now?" I asked.

He had risen and was rubbing his hands together thoughtfully, an action that always preceded some strenuous effort.

"I am going to search the house. The tracks from the house next door led here, and so far there are none leading away; but apart from that I know the package is here and it won't go out for some time yet, if at all. Mrs. Potts isn't the kind of a woman to let go easily."

"Well, Henshaw, you have yet to tell me where you found that black leather case."

"I found it in the attic of this house, and the reason I know it is a case for a vibrator is that I found one of them in it. The logical conclusion is that one of our enemies is a delicate man, for surely one wouldn't come on a job of this kind with a machine like this unless it was necessary."

"I could swear it is the one I noticed in the carriage the night I came."

"Probably; you and some one interested in Mrs. Hill may have come up on the same train. It is quite likely that when the Pottses found that you were coming, they notified some one else. At the present mo-

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ment the other seems like Ralph, but there is a chance that it may be Moses Banks!"

"My uncle—why, I think he is dead!"

"He is very much alive!" said Henshaw.

"Really? How do you know?"

"I don't like to tell you, but your Uncle Moses has quite a reputation."

"For what?" I asked, wondering what it was all about.

"For 'doing' other people. When I first heard the name I thought it was familiar and I had it looked up. He has been up for a number of small offenses and once did time for doing up a mate. This was under the name of Bart Moses. I got his record and description from Jarow. Oh, he's a tough one, this Moses Banks!"

"What skeletons we have in our closets and never know!" I said.

"Yes, and you see that he is a character that we must consider in such a case. In fact, he would be well investigated if he hadn't sailed to South America two days before Mrs. Hill's death."

"Well, that lets him out."

"Yes, unless he had planned this thing and used the trip as a blind, but nothing about it looks planned; it seems more a combination of circumstances, and that is why there is so little to take hold of. Things don't run one into the other. Now I am off to make the search; the Pottses are in the kitchen, aren't they?"

"Yes, or at least they were there, but these days I am not sure of anything, and you had better find out."

The thing that occupied my thoughts during the absence of Henshaw was the strange relation of Mary Bean to my aunt—the older woman trusting all of her secrets to this young girl whom she was not supposed to be on friendly terms with, even depending on her to the extent of the safety of her valuables. And how wonderfully the girl had fulfilled the trust! How bravely she had done what was expected of her and for no reason whatever save pity for the lonely old woman!

I said to myself, "There is a girl worth while, and when this wretched affair is over——"

Mr. Henshaw burst into the room.

"I've found it!" he said, holding up a small bundle of papers.

"Where?"

"Some one put it back in the old clock. Now let us see what we can find!"

CHAPTER XII

A CALL AND A CALLER

BY THE time I had recovered from the surprise of this statement, Henshaw with a slight "by your leave" had opened the package and was making a rapid survey of the contents. It was rather a good-sized bundle of papers, legal documents chiefly, and many of those yellow with age. I waited patiently until he had satisfied his own curiosity.

"Of course, it isn't here," he said bitterly, as he handed the package over to me.

"What?" I asked.

"What they wanted and what we want."

"The will, most likely?"

"Yes, and something else, unless I am all wrong."

"Here are several mortgages and deeds of property, all business. Not one personal word, and there was so much she wanted me to know!" I said sadly, at the thought of how all of her carefully laid plans had miscarried.

"Well," said Henshaw, "there is much to be done yet. In fact, we aren't even in sight of the end. If the will, or whatever it is that has been taken out, is in the house, we will get it and I have no reason to think that it has been taken away."

"It may have been destroyed."

"No, I think not. It is more valuable alive than dead. Now let us suppose that the Pottses have it—say Mrs. Potts, to be more accurate. If she destroys it, the property comes to you."

"But if Uncle Moses is alive?"

"They were not friends. She sent for you; Miss Bean knows of her intentions toward you. You'd win in any court! But to get back to the Potts family, it is probable that Mrs. Hill in her will left them some legacy which they would lose entirely if the will is lost or destroyed, so the thing to find out is the motive for withholding it. There must be either a previous will, which leaves most of the money to Ralph, or they are in the employ of Moses Banks. By keeping back the will he expects to profit as the next of kin."

"But if he sailed to South America?"

"That remains to be seen. If he doesn't show up here in the next day or two we may know that he is on the Atlantic Ocean and count him out of this game."

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"Could he have been the man who rode up with me the night I arrived?"

"No, the driver of the carriage is an old citizen and, though he hasn't seen Banks for years, he swears that couldn't be he, as your uncle is a tall, powerful man, and the stranger was small and slight, and he thought that it was an older man than Ralph Hill, but of course ill health has a way of making a man seem older."

"How do you account for the case and electrical affair?"

"That is easy; some one has been in hiding in the attic and left it there. I dare say efforts have been made to get hold of the machine—very likely the night you were shot its owner was trying to communicate with Mrs. Potts. Of course, Graham, because we want to run this thing down we can't just let our suspicions run wild. The bag you saw in the carriage may have been like this one and yet not it; it seems a very stupid thing for a man to come into a town with a dark deed up his sleeve and ride up boldly with this case in view, then leave it behind him in the house where the thing was done—such a criminal ought to be very easy to catch."

"But I am sure that he was interested."

"Very likely, and I don't mean to say that he has no connection. The fact that he was driven to the hotel and yet did not stop there is against him—it was done for a blind, I suppose, after he found out that you were on your way to Mrs. Hill's. He carried this vibrator and the heavy cane that you spoke of, and it may have been that he was too infirm to walk from the station, however much he may have wished to."

"Yes, he was so bundled up that I wouldn't know him again if I saw him, but I remember I had the impression that he was a sufferer."

"Yes, well, there is a chance there for finding out something." He got up and walked up and down the floor, rubbing his hands together thoughtfully; at last new light seem to break. "I must leave you for a while. You might go over these papers, but I am sure that you will find nothing there that will help us. Some careful hand has removed all damaging documents.

HE WENT out, leaving me to my own devices. I took up the papers and gave them my serious attention, and in consequence I learned that my aunt was a woman of ample means, rich for the circle in which she moved. She had been a good business woman and the money and property left by Mr. Hill had been invested and improved until a fair fortune had been accumulated. I regretted deeply the loss of the will, for it seemed cruel that after years of thrift and management her estate should be divided in a way contrary to her wishes.

Henshaw was gone most of the day and when he returned he was full of news that had a decided bearing on the case. He had been tracing the man who rode up with me, and he was now ready to tell me who my companion was.

"But first of all I will go back a little. You will remember that on the night before you arrived, you sent Mrs. Hill a telegram. She evidently told the Pottses that you were coming, or, if she didn't, they found out. I think this finding out business was Mr. Potts's job. Now they had other plans for Mrs. Hill's money, and Mrs. Potts did some telegraphing on her own account. I haven't found the record of it at the office, but the agent remembers that she sent a wire about a week ago, and though he doesn't remember to whom it was sent, it is quite certain that it was to some one whose name was unfamiliar to him. But that is easily gotten around, for it is more than likely that she wrote and kept in touch with Ralph under an assumed name or through some one else."

"Oh, I see. Have you lost him?"

"Not yet. But let us go back and get it all clear; then you will see that it couldn't be any one else. Mrs. Potts summoned some one who arrived on the same train that you did. For the best of reasons, I suppose, he did not walk up to the town, but rode. You saw the black case and his evidence of interest; the driver lost sight of him at the hotel, but the clerk is sure that he never entered the house. His actions argue a knowledge of the town, and when he left the vicinity of the hotel he came here, was taken in and hidden, and, in the hurry and excitement of getting away, he left the case behind.

"Then you may remember the tracks I found in the Doctor's yard the night after Mrs. Hill's death—the tracks of some one who stood and talked to Miss Bean. I told you that there was a part of her story that wasn't very clear. Her uneasiness and

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sleeplessness that night were quite out of place, now that you had come to be with your aunt. The man she talked to was some one she wanted to protect, and as far as I have been able to find out there has never been but the one affair, the one with Ralph Hill."

"It was he?"

"Everything points to it. We have long known that Mrs. Potts was fond of him and worked for his interest. Just how this stolen will affects him, I can't imagine, unless, as I said before, there is a previous one in his favor still in existence and they want to get this one out of the way."

"Do you think he saw my aunt?"

"I am not sure. It is almost unbelievable that she would not have called you or made some outcry had he annoyed her, but whether she saw him or not, something frightened her enough to signal Miss Bean. You heard steps passing your door and it may have been he. That we will know in time, I hope."

"Have you spoken to Miss Bean about this part of it?"

"No, the Doctor was at home this morning and I am waiting for him to get out of the way. I don't care for him to know anything about it, unless it becomes absolutely necessary."

"Do you think it was Potts or Ralph that shot me from the bush near the kitchen window?"

"It was not Potts. With his crippled hands I doubt if he could hold a gun; and then, too, I have found his footprints and, as predicted, they show a decided bearing on the right foot. His rheumatism is really bad, and I think we can count him out as having any active hand in the death of your aunt or any of the events that have followed. He may have been a go-between and we know that he is pretty much of a hypocrite, with the spying habit strong in him, but he has neither enough mind nor enough initiative for a deed of this kind."

"Poor old fellow, I have been quite hard on him!"

"We are all likely to go wrong, and Potts hasn't been above suspicion, but from the beginning I have thought that his wife was the storm-center."

"Well, I have given her plenty of hard thoughts," I answered.

"I know you have," he said with a laugh. "For a while you were ready to accuse her of all the crimes on the calendar, even designs on your life."

"I still believe I had a narrow escape the night I arrived—there was something in the food as sure as my name is Graham. By the way, have you said anything to her about the package?"

"No, and I am laying low for a day or so—I may as well tell you that the next move is to come from them. When they come from cover I hope to catch my man. I did not tell you that I was expecting your uncle at any hour?"

"Do you know that he is coming?"

"No; that is, I have no information that he is, but if he doesn't, then all my theories are as nothing and there is no profit in 'constructive detection.'"

"What is that?"

"That is what I call my method, or at least the fancy part of it. Of course, I do all of the hard work that any detective does, running down clues and the like, but when all of that is done I work in a constructive fashion rather than in a deductive way. So far, I have been fairly successful and that naturally gives me faith in my method, but it isn't one that I would advise to a beginner, as it is full of traps for any one with too much imagination."

"Illustrate," I said. "How have you 'constructed' this?"

"To be accurate, I have reconstructed it—gone over the ground and found who would benefit if the thing was done. If it shaped itself in another way and with the lights before me, I can only see one thing to happen. That is for some one to turn up who has an equal if not a greater claim to the estate than you have. Ralph is only an adopted son and a cast-off, so what chance has he? The brother of Mrs. Hill is the only one, and, as I have said so many times, if he isn't on his way to the South he will be here in twenty-four hours."

"Could he and Ralph be working together?"

"Not that I know of. Banks was never here while Ralph was with Mrs. Hill, and if they have met—" here he paused—"if they have met, that is something that I have not taken into account."

"Well, I guess not. They have been so far apart."

"Let us find out before we say how far apart they are. I'll follow it up."

"Since you have other things to do, I'll

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go over to inquire about Miss Bean, with your permission. You see how cautious I am now—not a move without consulting you."

"Go ahead, or, rather, I'll go with you. I want to see her, too."

"Alone?"

"That remains to be seen. If I give you the wink, clear out; otherwise I'd like you to be there as a witness."

A SHORT while after, we rang the Doctor's bell, and the same solemn woman who had given me the note came to the door. I asked whether Miss Bean would see us.

"She ain't getting around much, but I will see."

She left us and in a few minutes returned and said that Miss Bean would be down shortly. This was good news, and when she entered I forgot all about wo and tragedy. The sight of her sweet, fresh face made the world a glad place. She was not quite herself; the excitement had told on her and she leaned on a heavy cane as she walked. I inquired as to the injury to her ankle.

"Oh, I'll be around in a few days," she replied, "but the next time I climb a wall I will be more careful."

"It was fine of you to do what you did," I said.

"It was nothing, only I am sorry that our plans failed so. How do you think it happened?"

"I unfortunately left it—that is, your note—in the pocket of my coat when I changed it after the rain."

"Oh, I see, and some one found it. Who?"

"We aren't sure, but whoever it was stood close by me when you dropped the package, and when I started to go the blow came from behind."

"Have you any chance of getting it back? I hope so, for her plans were so dear to her."

During all of this talk Henshaw had been silent, but now, as she turned to him, he said very abruptly, "Miss Bean, will you tell me who the man was that you talked to on the night that Mrs. Hill died?"

She looked at him, her eyes wide with surprise.

"I don't understand," she said, as soon as she recovered a little.

"I will make it clearer. On the night in question you stood in your yard, near the porch and talked to some one. He left you and went to the rear of the house. Later you went over to Mrs. Hill's for the papers."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"By the footprints and by your story. As helpful as you have been, it is plain that you are protecting some one. I will find out in the end, but it will be easier for all of us if you tell me now."

"I am sorry that you aren't satisfied with what I told you, but it was the very best that I could do. I am sorry," she said again, as she rose. "I am not very well and you will excuse me, won't you?"

With a bow that included both of us she left the room.

Henshaw and I took ourselves home and on the way over he said:

"A fine girl, but one of those obstacles that a detective hates to come in contact with. But no matter, we know now."

The rest of the day was uneventful, and the night that followed was without incident, but the next morning brought a new element into the game, and from that moment until the affair was settled, there was scarcely a breathing-spell for those of us under Aunt Hannah's roof.

We were at breakfast when Mrs. Potts came in and announced in her metallic voice:

"A Mr. Banks is in the front room and wants to see you."

Henshaw's prophecy had come true!

CHAPTER XIII

UNCLE MOSES BANKS

AS I ENTERED the living-room I saw standing before the fire a tall, powerfully-built man, and as he turned, I looked into eyes that were set far back under bushy brows. I could scarcely call him a prepossessing man, though there was a kind of bluff heartiness about him that one has come to associate with sailors. A large hand was extended to me and a gruff voice said:

"So you are Mary's son?"

"Yes, this is the first time that we have met. Had I known of your whereabouts I would have notified you of my aunt's death."

"I heard of it by accident. There was a short notice in a Boston paper and I thought, as I was the last of the family, I would come up and look over things."

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"I am glad you came. It will simplify things," I said.

"Well, it ought to. I am pretty close kin to the departed."

His manner was coarse and offensive, and evidently meant to intimidate me. Henshaw had warned me and I was on my guard, as we did not wish an open rupture at this time.

"This is your first visit in how long?"

"Oh, thirty years, I guess. The old place looks familiar, not much changed, but it takes a hundred years for things to change in this part of the country."

"I am not so sure; they move rapidly sometimes."

Then we talked on about indifferent matters, and all the while I could see that he had something on his mind and was hunting about for the best way to say it. I fancied that it had to do with money, and was not surprised when he asked:

"Did Hannah leave a will?"

"She did, but it has been stolen," I answered.

"Stolen?" he cried. "When—where?"

"Well, I can't go into details, because I know so little about it, but we have hopes of getting it back."

"We?" he queried.

"Yes, I have a friend stopping here with me who has had some experience in such matters, and he thinks that it will turn up. Oh, here you are!" I said, as Henshaw entered.

"Mr. Henshaw, Mr. Banks."

The two men shook hands, and as they did so, I thought they took measure of each other. Henshaw's manner was studiedly indifferent, the look on my uncle's face I couldn't quite make out. Could it be that at some time he had come in contact with the detective? At any rate his manner was less aggressive than when we had been alone.

"We rather expected you, Mr. Banks," said Henshaw.

"Yes?" answered the other, controlling his surprise. "Well, but for an accident I would be on my way to South America."

"How is that?"

"I had signed with a sailing vessel when I learned that Hannah was dead. They were friends of mine and let me out."

Henshaw gave me a slight glance and I saw that this inaccurate statement had registered on his mind as it had on mine, for we knew that Banks's ship sailed several days before the death of Aunt Hannah. I wondered, from this, whether there had been some deep-laid plot rather than a tragic accident as Henshaw was inclined to believe.

The rest of our conversation was unsatisfactory, as was natural under such conditions. There sat Henshaw and I ready to pounce on any clue that he should let fall, and he, I suppose, wondering how he could find out something to his advantage. I took no lead in the talk, for I wasn't sure how much Henshaw wanted him to know, and his manner of treating the newcomer was one that I found hard to interpret. By turns he was friendly and communicative, then harsh and almost threatening in his attitude.

THEN they got into a long-drawn-out discussion about sailing vessels. Uncle Moses thawed out and became almost jovial. Henshaw at first took the lead in the talk, but after the second drink had been passed around, he became silent and gave Banks the floor. It was all most uninteresting to me, and when I could stand no more I withdrew and sought the kitchen and the society of Mr. Potts. I had not seen him all day, and I wanted to know what he was about. My conscience pricked me for my rough treatment of the old fellow. I found him alone before the kitchen fire. His wife had gone to the village.

"How are you to-day, Mr. Potts?"

"Miserable, Mr. Graham. All these things going on, a man don't know what to think, and now that brother of Mrs. Hill's coming—she wouldn't like that, I can tell you!"

"Had they quarreled?"

"I guess so; whenever she was mad at anybody she always said, 'They are as mean as Moses!'"

I smiled at this and thought that my aunt's estimate of her brother's character was about right.

"Mr. Potts, have you any idea where Ralph is? We want to get hold of him."

"The young rat!" he flared up. "I wish you could get him; he is no good. I told you before, Mr. Graham, he gets everybody into trouble. If it hadn't been for him, Mrs. Hill would be alive."

He was shaking his head from side to side in a way that indicated misery of mind and body.

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"How do you mean?" I asked sympathetically. I wanted to say nothing that would stop this sudden burst of confidence.

"He worried her to death begging and such like."

"Was he here the night of her death?"

He paused and looked at me a moment. There was cunning in his eyes and hatred, too.

"Yes, he was here. He came to get money. I don't know whether he killed her, but it would be just like him, he is so mean."

"What else happened that night?"

"I don't know. He got away, but he has been around since. I ain't got no use for him. All our savings has gone to him!"

"Why was that?"

"Oh—" suddenly his wildness dropped from him and he was once more the cringing old man, "Mr. Graham, you won't tell what I've told you, will you? He'd kill me if he knew, and Mrs. Potts wouldn't like it. I can depend on you, can't I, sir?"

"I will do my best for you, but what is Ralph to Mrs. Potts?"

"She raised him and is fond of him, though he ain't never been good to her that I can see. But women are queer."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know where he hides, but he is apt to come about any time."

Just then Henshaw came in and I repeated my conversation with Potts. He asked to be left alone with the old man, and as I went out Potts called after me:

"You won't let Amanda know how you found out?"

"No, I will try not."

I didn't want to go out at all, as I was vitally interested in all that Potts had to say, but I had vowed to put no further obstacle in Henshaw's way. Besides, one of us was to keep an eye on Moses Banks. That gentleman kept to himself most of the day, not once going out of the house, though I suggested that he might like to look up old friends.

"For thirty years," he answered, "I have been out of touch with the people of this town, and I can't have much interest in them. Besides I like the old place best—here is the room where my father gave me the last licking that I ever got. I ran away the next day, and since then when there has been any licking I have done it. My experience is that you have either got to lick or get licked."

He must have had another drink or two, for he was quite gay and rather inclined to treat me as a favorite nephew, but as the day drew to a close this mood passed and he grew surly and taciturn. He shut himself up and declared that he wanted to take a nap.

CHAPTER XIV

TRAGEDY ENTERS

HENSHAW was nowhere about, and as I had received no instructions from him, I felt free to leave the house. I went to the telegraph-office to send several wires. I was obliged to conduct my business in this way, as I had resolved to stand by until this thing got settled one way or another. As I walked back, thinking it all over, Doctor Bean passed in his buggy and offered to drive me home. I accepted and had a pleasant chat with him. He was surprised to hear that Moses Banks had turned up, and curious to know what he was like after all these years. I am afraid that I didn't give the Doctor a very glowing account of my uncle, and was glad when the conversation shifted to his daughter. She was improving, he told me, and would be herself soon. He dropped me at my door and went on his way.

Henshaw was waiting for me in the living-room.

"Graham, I want you to be on the watch to-night; there is something stirring that I don't like, and I can't be in two places at once."

"Did you get anything new from Potts?"

"Not much, but I think I will have my hands on the young man to-night. I did find out that Ralph is pretty much of a physical wreck, and it was he that you saw in the carriage."

"Poor devil—and so young!"

"It will make wrecks of the best of us," answered Henshaw. "Good evening, Mr. Banks," he said, as the large body of my uncle came in the door.

"Evening," he answered gruffly. "Say, what are you two young fellows doing in this rotten town? Of course you," turning an ugly glance on me, "have interests here, but you, Henshaw, it's rough on you—not a saloon in the town!"

"I can get along without that for a while, and I find much of interest here," Henshaw said.

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"I've got a notion that you are a detective," said Banks, as he sat down on the old settle. His tone was hard and aggressive, as if he wished to pick a quarrel.

"I guess Mrs. Potts put that idea in your head when you were gossiping with her this afternoon. I didn't know you were old friends, because she always denied knowing anything about you," said Henshaw calmly.

"What are you talking about? I don't know the woman. I was in my room all afternoon!" was his blustering reply.

"The greatest faith in me, Mr. Banks, is in my own eyesight. I trust my nose, too, and it says that supper is ready. Shall I go see, Graham?"

"Surely," I answered, and he went out, leaving me with my amiable uncle.

"One of those fresh detectives!" he said, presently. "What is he doing here?"

"He is my guest," I said quietly.

"As there was no will, it strikes me that you haven't much right to have guests here!"

As he sat opposite me, a great hulk of a man with a heavy, vicious face, he was evidently in a mood for a fight, and was going out of his way to get one. But I took Henshaw's tip and avoided an argument by leaving the room. He soon followed and the three of us sat down to the table together.

Mrs. Potts, silent and more forbidding than ever, waited on us. After supper we returned to the living-room and sat about the fire until Uncle Moses expressed his intention of going down to the village. He went out, and shortly afterward Henshaw followed him. I was instructed to wait up for him and keep an eye on things.

Left to myself, I made an occasional round of the house and found the Pottses in the kitchen until nine o'clock, when they retired to their room, which was just back of the kitchen and connected with it by a swinging door. Around eleven I heard my uncle come in. He must have been drunk from the way he mounted the stairs. Later I tiptoed to his door and all was still.

It was a cold night and I sat before the fire, wondering where Henshaw was and wishing he were in out of the bleak, raw night. I opened the door that led into the hall so that I could hear any stirring about in the house. All was quiet, the fire burned low and I was too sleepy to replenish it. The wind outside howled as it had the night Aunt Hannah died.

Suddenly I had an uncanny feeling as if some one were creeping up behind me. I turned quickly. There was nothing but the deep shadow of the room and the blackness of the hall beyond; then there came a sound, a queer, terrible sound, like an animal in pain! I jumped up, dashed into the hall, and followed the direction of the sound through the dining-room and kitchen and to the room beyond.

In the light of the small night-lamp I saw a sight that almost froze the blood in my veins. I looked about the room; no one was there, and the horror of the thing made me run to the front of the house as Henshaw turned his key in the door.

"Is it you, Graham?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I've got him. Ralph Hill is under lock and key!"

"But, Henshaw, come quick, poor old Potts has been killed!"

CHAPTER XV

THE SKY CLEARS

WITHOUT a word Henshaw followed me. The scene was unchanged, the night-lamp still flickered and poor old rheumatic Potts lay in his bed, free at last from all of his woes! He had been choked to death, and the sight was horrible to look upon. Henshaw made an examination of the room, then turned to me.

"When did you find this out?"

"About five minutes ago I was in the living-room and I heard him scream. I rushed out here and found him alone and dead!"

"You didn't hear him scream, for he has been dead an hour or more. Where is Banks?"

"In his room. I heard him go up an hour ago, and he hasn't made a sound since".

"I knew something was coming off, but I never expected poor old Potts to fare so badly. Where is his wife?"

"I don't know."

"Stay here until I come back."

He left the room and I laid a sheet over the figure on the bed and lighted the large lamp in an attempt to dispel the gloom of the scene. How had such a thing happened,

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and over an hour ago? So Ralph was caught at last! Well, if he killed Potts as well as hastened the end of Aunt Hannah, he would have to answer for it. How strange, I thought, as I waited for the return of the detective—how strange this break from my quiet, busy life into this round of midnight adventures and thefts and murders! Henshaw had been gone only a few moments when he returned.

"He's gone," he said briefly, and he began a search of the room. He opened drawers, looked behind and over and under everything in the room and at last on the top shelf of the old wardrobe his search was rewarded.

"Here it is, Graham!" he said, as he glanced over it. "The lost will and something else; a letter addressed to you, for one thing."

At this moment the door that led from the kitchen to the back yard was thrown open, and Mrs. Potts rushed into the room, wide-eyed and breathless.

"He wasn't in!" she said.

"Who?" I asked, amazed.

"The Doctor. Tell me, he ain't dead, is he?" She had evidently not noticed Henshaw, for all of her remarks were addressed to me.

"I am afraid he is, Mrs. Potts."

"Oh, God! It ain't fair! I never done a thing to deserve this! Oh, oh!"

She sank to her knees by the bed, her great frame shaken by sobs that filled me with an aching pity for her. Never had I witnessed a grief so wild and terrible, and it was thrown into high relief by her former stoical manner.

"Well, Mrs. Potts, things have come to a fine end," Henshaw said, leaving his corner. "Banks is gone, Potts is dead, we have the will, and Ralph is in jail!"

It was the last statement that made her spring to her feet and cry out:

"Ralph! That ain't right—he ain't done nothing—he is weak and foolish, but not wicked! Let him out! I'll tell you everything if you will let him go!"

"What is he to you?"

"He is my boy, my son! I don't care who knows now!"

It was our turn to be amazed, and I think we both showed it.

"I will do all I can for you, Mrs. Potts, if you will be frank with me. Won't you sit here?"

"No, I'll stay by him."

And the two of us sat on old chairs while Mrs. Potts crouched by the bed of her dead husband and told her strange story.

"I guess I'll have to go back a long way to make you understand how I have acted as I have since Mrs. Hill died. I know you think I am a bad woman, and I don't claim to be one of the best, but I ain't had no easy life, and maybe that will even things up somehow. He"—she pointed to Potts—"is the only human that was ever good to me without any reason; everybody else has wanted to use me, even Ralph, but he is so young, he don't understand. I lived in a little town near Boston until I was grown up, then I went into the city to find work; and the best I could get was to be a waitress in a sailors' restaurant. I met a lot of men and they made up to me, but I didn't take to any of them until—until——" she paused.

"Until Moses Banks came along," Henshaw helped out.

"Yes—how did you know? Maybe you know all I am going to tell you. If you do, don't make me go through it, for it ain't much fun."

"I am absolutely ignorant of your history, Mrs. Potts, and that was only a guess on my part."

"WELL, Banks came along. He had just run away from home and was young and countrified. I helped him out and showed him where and how he could get work. He was crazy to go to sea, and it wasn't long before he left and was gone three months. When he got back I was still working, and he was more of a man and we just took to each other. I thought he would marry me, but after Ralph was born, he got tired. But we dragged on for two or three years and then he got a chance to go on a long trip and left me high and dry.

"I had a hard time to make a living, but I stuck it out until Ralph was near seven. I told you, Mr. Graham, that he was five when he came here, but I told all kinds of things to throw you off the track. Well, Banks didn't come back, and as I had a lot of his letters and things, I wrote to his sister and told her about the child. I didn't tell her that I was its mother, but made out that she was dead, and the father, too, and asked if she wouldn't do something for the

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little fellow. I said I had had the boy for a year or so, but couldn't take care of it any longer, as I was too poor.

"Banks had told me about what he called the 'Methodist consciences' of his people, so I guessed they wouldn't let one of their blood want for a home. I got a letter from her saying she would take the child, but she knew nothing about children and would I come along to look after the boy and do general work? She didn't want it known that Ralph was her brother's son, but would adopt him as the child of an old friend. I was happy over this and we came down. Potts came here to work and we got married after a while, and I had the easiest time of my life.

"Mrs. Hill was a hard, bossy woman, but we got along until Ralph grew up. She didn't understand him and he tried her patience, I guess; anyway, it got to be pretty bad, and then he fell in love with the Doctor's daughter. If Mrs. Hill had left that alone, he might have gone straight, but she told the Doctor and it was all off. He wouldn't let Mary go with the boy, and that took the heart out of him, of course. None of us told him what the trouble was, but he found out through some papers that I had, and then he ran away. My poor boy, he's had a hard time, too, and now he is in jail!"

She broke down and cried bitterly.

"We will do what we can, Mrs. Potts, and if he is innocent Graham will see that he gets a fresh start. Tell us about the events that preceded Mrs. Hill's death."

"About a year ago Mrs. Hill began to ail, and as time went on, I saw that she wasn't here for long. I knew she was rich, and it seemed hard that Ralph shouldn't get a cent. He was in bad health and not really able to work, so it wasn't so much that I was greedy, but it meant so much to him. I knew that she was planning to leave her money to her other nephew and thought I had a right to look after my boy's interest. It wasn't his fault that he came into the world wrong.

"Through old friends in Boston I found out Banks' whereabouts and kept track of him just enough to be able to lay my hands on him at the right time. Of course, I knew I stood no chance of getting a thing for Ralph without his help, but I did try, and at last I sent for Ralph to see if he couldn't make his peace with her before she died, but he was sick and didn't get here until the night Mr. Graham came, and then it was too late!"

"You mean he didn't see Mrs. Hill the night she died?"

"No, he didn't see her at all. Late in the night I went to her room to see if she wouldn't see him, but she refused, and I lost my temper and threatened her that all of her plans would be upset if she didn't help him. I guess she was scared, but she was quiet and made me light a candle so she could see the 'face of ingratitude,' she said."

Henshaw and I looked at each other as we recognized the signal to Mary Bean.

"I stayed with her while she talked on, but she wouldn't promise. Then I made up my mind to steal the will. I knew where she kept it; I had even had a key made to the clock. I shut her door and started down the stairs. I found the clock open and the bundle gone! As I thrust my hand in, it began to strike, and I was in such a rage that I gave the pendulum such an awful jerk that the whole works fell out of place and it stopped striking. Mrs. Hill had followed me, for she screamed and fell, and so I really killed her, though I never meant to go that far!"

"Where was Ralph during all of this?"

"He was in the attic, asleep. He had been sick, as I told you, and didn't have much heart for any of it. He shot at Mr. Graham that night when he went to the window, but more because he was afraid than anything else. But after Mrs. Hill was dead and Mr. Graham went for the Doctor, I got Ralph out of the house."

"Had you communicated with Banks before Mrs. Hill's death?"

"Yes, I wrote him that his sister was ill and to stay close by, as there might be a chance for him, and that I would telegraph him when to come."

"Your plan was to steal the will, have Banks appear as next of kin and hold the will over him to make him divide with Ralph?"

"Yes, and when I found it was gone, I didn't know what to do, but I soon learned that Mr. Graham didn't have it. When I found that note in his pocket I laid for him under Mary Bean's window and got hold of it. Then I sent for Banks. He was hard to deal with and wanted most of the money for himself, and I had about made up my mind to deal with Mr. Graham when this happened."

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"I know that you saw him this afternoon, but did you to-night?" Henshaw asked.

"Yes, I sent him to see Ralph—to take him food, and when he got back he came to the kitchen door and said that Ralph must see me at once. I went to the meeting-place and waited over an hour. Then it came to me that it was a trick on Banks' part, and I ran back and this is what I found. You heard me scream before. I ran for the Doctor. My poor old man! He never harmed anybody and now that he is dead, I don't mind telling all about myself. But you see he thought I was a good woman." Then a fury seized her and she cried out, "That beast! To kill him! Just let me see him once and I will fix him! Every time he has crossed my path there has been the devil to pay, but I'll get him yet!"

All of this was news to me, needless to say, and especially that Uncle Moses was the murderer of Potts. I turned to Henshaw:

"Is it true?" I asked.

"Yes, when he got back from Ralph and delivered his fake message, he lurched upstairs and later got out of his window on to the roof of the porch and swung himself to the ground. This was to keep out of the way. He entered the kitchen from the back yard and, on Potts's refusal to give up the will, choked him to death."

"Where is he now?"

"I have just heard the one-fifteen whistle and I have an idea that your uncle is aboard and out of the way for all time!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE LETTER

THE rest can be told in a few words. Aunt Hannah's letter cleared up a few of the places that were dark to us. It was written in a fashion characteristic of the woman who had lived and died in an unusual way:

To John Graham, son of my Sister Mary:—I will not hypocritically call you my "dear nephew," for I scarcely know you, and you have no reason to love me. I still think Mary was wrong, but that is passed. She was a good woman and, whatever her mistake, it was an honest one. When you read my will, you will see that after Potts receives his five thousand, you will get the rest of my estate. I know you to be honest and industrious, and it is into such hands that I want my savings to fall.

As you will learn, I have cut my brother, Moses Banks, off, and I warn you never to have dealings with him. He has been from his youth a disgrace to our family. Likewise his son, Ralph. I adopted him and gave him every chance, but it was no use; he inherited his father's bad qualities with no virtue from his mother to counteract them. I recommend to you Hiram Potts. He is a hypocrite, but he has been a faithful servant to me, and deserves your kindness.

I want you to know Mary Bean. You will find her noble, true and charming. I would have been a softer, better woman had I had a daughter like that. Be honest and just your life through, and take a blessing from your old aunt,

HANNAH HILL.

I read the letter and handed it over to Henshaw, whose only comment was:

"I like that aunt of yours. It is too bad!"

And so it was ended. The day after Potts was buried, Henshaw left us. We talked it over and decided that there should be no effort on our part to find Banks, and Potts's death was given out as having been from natural causes. This may have been juggling with the law, but the circumstances justified it, and Henshaw was a private detective with no allegiance to the authorities. Poor old Potts! He died refusing to give up the will to Banks. He was a faithful servant!

Ralph was restored to his mother and I made over the old homestead to them. He was broken in health and would never be strong, but with the home and the money Mrs. Potts inherited from her husband they were very well taken care of and able to forget, in some measure, the tragic time through which we all passed.

And Mary Bean married me. I can say no more, for that one sentence tells that out of all the darkness and tragedy came the great beauty and joy of my life.

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Is This What You Want?

A MISSOURI PACIFIC freight train out of Kansas City piled up at the foot of Little Blue Hill. The cause of the wreck was a car with rotten sills. On the train was Rube Oglesby, a young brakeman. His right leg was amputated nearly to the hip; his left was stripped and lacerated. It was eighteen months before he was able to do anything.

Rube Oglesby sued the Missouri Pacific. He got a verdict for $15,000. No money paid—judgment appealed—the case carried up to the Supreme Court; judgment affirmed by six judges out of seven. Later a rehearing was granted the railroad; the Supreme Court again affirmed judgment. A wait; case reopened, and the third time the Supreme Court of Missouri affirmed the judgment of $15,000 to Rube Oglesby. Once more the case was reopened, tried in a different county; again Oglesby got judgment; again up to the Supreme Court went the case, and on June 15, 1903, nearly eleven years after the accident, the Supreme Court of Missouri decided against Oglesby, and then refused him another trial.

A newspaper man of his home town was fined $500 by the Supreme Court for printing what he thought of the case. The editor's fellow townsmen wired the amount to the capital during the noon recess of court, welcomed him home with a brass band, elected Rube Oglesby Railway Commissioner, and his associates on the commission made him chairman. The Supreme Court of the United States had held that it was the duty of a railway company to its employees to use reasonable care to see that its cars were in good condition. The Missouri Pacific didn't want this doctrine upheld by the state court. That's the reason Rube Oglesby got what he did from the courts of the state.

Do you like this interpretation of the law? It may be all right for the other fellow; but would you like it for yourself? If you do, there is no use talking to you. But if you are in favor of justice for every man, woman, and child, we ask you earnestly to read

"BIG BUSINESS *and* THE BENCH"

by C. P. Connolly, now running in the March number of

Everybody's Magazine

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